

“In the Land of Sandstorms and Sand:” Locating Texas Technological College in 1923

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As the Thirty-eighth Texas Legislature convened in January 1923 certain members took up the task of creating a public college for the western portion of the state. Not a new idea, this effort represented the culmination of at least seven years of political machinations on behalf of West Texas politicians and businessmen. The people of West Texas sought to establish a college of their own, with a fervor that could not be denied. William Curry Holden, candidate for state representative of Nolan County, noted, “West Texas then was becoming conscious that. . . all their money was going to spend [on] things in the east part of the state, all their taxes. People thought about this and got good and mad.”¹ Their anger resulted in Senate Bill 103 which established Texas Technological College (now Texas Tech University). The bill called for an independent locating board to determine the new college’s location based on particular criteria including, the quality of the land, availability of water, accessibility, and infrastructure. Of the thirty-seven applicants for the new college, the locating board chose Lubbock, Texas, but their selection was based on political pressure rather than the merit of the city’s application.

Twice before—1917 and 1921—bills to create a college began to work their way through the legislature only to fail in the end. The 1917 effort nearly resulted in the establishment of the West Texas Agricultural and Mechanical. Governor James Ferguson, far from a paragon of integrity, served as the chairman of the locating committee. After the selection of a site on July 1, 1917, news surfaced that Ferguson manipulated the voting process to ensure Abilene won the much sought-after institution.² The Texas Senate voted during a special session that summer to remove

Ferguson from office for misappropriation of public funds. Lieutenant Governor W. P. Hobby, under the recommendation of the legislature, repealed the West Texas A&M bill.³

The second attempt in 1921 resulted in House Bill Number 154, which passed both houses of the legislature with a mere \$50,000 appropriation for the purchase of lands. In addition to lackluster funding, the college created by this law would be a subordinate to Texas A&M in Bryan rather than a stand-alone state college. Lawmakers from West Texas pushed to enact the law without the support of a plank in the Democratic Party Platform. Governor Pat Neff vetoed the bill, stating, "a Democratic administration should do the thing that it was asked not to do by the State Democratic convention, does not seem to me to be the wise and prudent thing to do." Neff urged lawmakers to "wait until the times are natural and normal. Things are now uncertain and unsettled."⁴ The veto message produced discontent in the western section of the state, with some newspaper editorials going so far as to call for secession from the rest of Texas.⁵

A year later the Texas Democratic Convention met in San Antonio during the first week of September. Delegates from West Texas saw it as their mission to secure the inclusion of the West Texas A&M College as a plank to the platform. Citizens of the region, urged by members of the West Texas Chamber of Commerce, embarked on a massive publicity campaign. Residents of West Texas who previously lived in the eastern part of the state contacted their old congressmen to elicit support for the cause. At the convention, Homer Wade and Porter Whaley from of the West Texas Chamber of Commerce led the fight to establishing the college with delegates from Bryan, home to Texas A&M, in opposition.⁶ An editorial published just two days before the convention closed argued, "a new school with like mission as old A&M but with separate control, would, in my opinion, can [*sic*] only serve to help disorganize our higher education, which now is far from being well systematized."⁷

Members of the West Texas delegation approached the commencement of the Thirty-eighth Legislature with competing bills that all sought to revive the West Texas College. The *Dallas Morning News* reported on the first two versions of the bill: Senate Bill Number 103 authored by Lubbock Senator William Harrison Bledsoe and House Bill Number 129 proposed by Representative Roy Alvin Baldwin from Slaton, in Lubbock County. Richard Mortimer Chitwood of Sweetwater introduced Senator Bledsoe's bill in the House of Representatives. While the proposals sought similar goals, some differences existed. Senator Bledsoe called for the West Texas College to operate under the board of directors of Texas A&M College, effectively making the school a branch of an already established institution, while Baldwin sought to provide an entirely separate college on the same level as Texas A&M and the University of Texas. The two lawmakers requested different sized appropriations—Baldwin asking for a conservative \$150,000 for purchasing the land, and Bledsoe \$1,000,000 over three years for land and construction. The final dissimilarity involved the composition of the locating board, with Baldwin asking for a governor-led board, while Bledsoe wanted to involve prominent Texas educators rather than politicians.⁸

While the legislature unsuccessfully worked to reconcile the two bills, representatives from Dallas put forth a third option. House Bill Number 261, proposed by Lewis T. Carpenter and Thomas K. Irwin, sought to “authorize the building and equipping of a college of technology and textile engineering.”⁹ Introduced on January 20 the bill produced significant anxiety for the authors of the West Texas College bills, because Carpenter and Irwin did not specify that their proposed college of technology would be located in the western section of the state. Indeed, Carpenter saw the importance of creating “an institution comparable to the Georgia Tech or Boston Tech, but owing to conditions in Texas.”¹⁰ No educational program in Texas filled such a niche. Vast quantities of raw materials—cotton, wool, leather, and food products—left the state to be processed by workers elsewhere. Carpenter suggested the bill go before the House Committee on Commerce and

Manufacturing, of which he was the chair, rather than the education committee chaired by Chitwood. H. B. No. 261 passed Carpenter's committee with a recommendation "that it do pass" on January 22.¹¹

West Texas Chamber of Commerce Legislative Manager Porter Whaley, knowing of the impending January 26 vote on the Bledsoe bill, asked the senator from Lubbock to schedule a meeting with all the authors of the various college bills. The subsequent conference took place on January 25, 1923, and included Bledsoe, Chitwood, Carpenter, Baldwin, Representative Mathes from Plainview, Silliman Evans from the *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, and West Texas Chamber of Commerce representative Homer Wade. Wade, once all the men had entered the room, stated, "I have the keys to the room in my pocket, and they will not be removed therefrom until . . . an agreement is reached."¹²

Reconciling differences between the bills proposed by Bledsoe and Baldwin represented the bulk of the meeting. Baldwin argued adamantly for the independence of the college from the board of directors of Texas A&M and for an appropriation of no more than \$500,000 in order to appease tightfisted lawmakers outside of the West Texas region. Bledsoe and Chitwood reassured Baldwin that "\$1,000,000 was not out of line," but conceded that if members of the legislature deemed the appropriation too large, they would show flexibility.¹³ Baldwin, however, got the group to agree to the independent board of directors, again with the ability to change should pressure mount from other legislators. The negotiators included the technological and manufacturing aspects of Carpenter's bill in the language of the compromise, which prompted the Dallas representative to support the endeavor.

With the bulk of the work finished, the final question remained—what to call the institution? This discussion resulted in some talk about the potential location of the new school. Burke Mathes recalled: "They'd been moving that Lubbock was the town all along." In fact, Mathes admitted the members of the meeting thought Lubbock "was the logical location for it. Sweetwater had

lots of friends. We used to recommend some towns just to have opposition in there. We'd make those real good friends in Lubbock really scream." Someone at the meeting suggested the name Lubbock Tech, but Chitwood would not agree to that. Rather than include the name of the town in the school's name, the idea of Texas Technological College appealed to everyone because "there is only one other Tech we know and that's Georgia Tech, and we want a school like that here." According to Mathes, the legislators had already decided the location of the school in January but created the process of competitive bidding to induce the best possible bid from Lubbock.¹⁴

Senator Bledsoe and Representative Chitwood substituted the newly crafted legislation for the pending Senate Bill 103, which the House had scheduled for a vote on January 26. Representing a mix of the bills offered by Baldwin and Bledsoe with Carpenter's technological aspect attached, the compromise satisfied a majority of members of the House of Representatives. The vote taken to engross the new bill registered one-hundred yeas and twenty nays.¹⁵ Three days later the bill easily passed with the Senate's approval, twenty-four to five.¹⁶ On February 7 the House voted to pass Senate Bill 103 with a vote of ninety-five to twenty-six with a few absences. Chitwood, Mathes, and Baldwin all registered votes for the measure, indicating that the meeting of January 26 satisfied each of them. Surprisingly, Representative Carpenter of Dallas failed to be present in the House that day. Irwin, Carpenter's co-author, recorded a vote for the new bill.¹⁷

The result of the compromise established a state-funded co-educational institution "west of the ninety-eighth meridian and north of the twenty-ninth parallel, to be known as the Texas Technological College." The scope of the mission of the new college encompassed the fields in the arts and sciences found at "standard senior colleges of the first class," but included "instruction in technology and textile engineering from which a student may reach the highest degree of education along the lines of manufacturing." Additionally, Texas Technological College aimed

to provide agricultural training for “the particular soil, climate and condition of that portion of the State in which the college is located.” Finally, the new institution would provide appropriate military-style training to all white, male students as required by federal government as a stipulation for financial assistance.¹⁸

The language of the bill also discussed the placement of the new college. The locating board would consist of the “Chairman of the State Board of Control, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the President of the University of Texas, the President of the College of Industrial Arts of Texas, and the President of the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas.” Lawmakers appropriated \$150,000 for the acquisition of two thousand acres of land for the construction of the college. The board could not “be influenced to any degree in the determination of its selection of a location by offers and promises of bonuses and gifts.” Rather they should “locate this college where it can, in the future, render the greatest service to the State and to the section of the United States for which it is especially intended.”¹⁹ The inclusion of the phrase “the section of the United States” indicates the lawmakers intended for the college to be located in the Texas Panhandle since it consisted of land comparable to the vast agricultural region known as the Southern Plains.

This sort of plains-centric language runs counter to the rest of the bill, which calls for the training in manufacturing products from cotton, leather, and wool. Texas in 1920 produced 4,148,399 bales of cotton, which represented thirty percent of all cotton grown in the United States for that year. Oklahoma, comparatively, produced less than ten percent of the 1920 crop and New Mexico did not produce enough cotton to register in the census.²⁰ Texas claimed over nine percent of all cattle in the United States, more than double the number of bovine in Oklahoma and New Mexico combined.²¹ Furthermore, Texas led the region in the wool and mohair market by an incredible amount. While Oklahoma and New Mexico together produced just over .54% of the dollar value of wool and mohair of the United States during 1919, Texas offered

8.4% of that total value.²² Texas' ability to out-produce its neighbors undoubtedly came from the enormous disparity in size in the states. That difference in size, however, bolstered the argument for a school that would focus exclusively on the unique agricultural conditions of West Texas and the manufacturing interests of the whole state.

Senator Bledsoe crowed that he wrote the bill in a manner that would exclude nearly all towns in West Texas aside from Lubbock.²³ In laying out the requirements a qualifying site would possess, Bledsoe "claimed that he pulled a little smarty on them down there." The Lubbock senator believed the combination of two thousand acres of arable land actually adjoining the town with access to "plenty of drinking water testing a certain percentage of purity" disqualified nearly all other potential contenders.²⁴ The language of the bill did not specify conditions for the water supply. However, the document produced by the locating board following the passage of the bill does shed light on those conditions. At least four important considerations had to enter into a satisfactory water supply, namely: quality, quantity, permanency, and cost of making it available. "Whether the source of supply is a running stream, a surface lake, a deep or shallow well, are considerations which must in the last analysis enter very largely into the final determination of this question."²⁵

Water should have been an important consideration in placing a state-supported agricultural and manufacturing college. The insistence that the source would "enter very largely into the final determination" suggested the board preferred some sources over others. Clifford L. Gibbs, in his unpublished thesis covering the establishment of Texas Tech, asserted, "The locating board was certain that the college would not be located where there was impounded water," but he never supported that claim with a citation.²⁶

In addition to outlining the water requirements, the document issued by the locating board provided basic instructions

for the application process and explained the other requirements of Senate Bill 103 in plain language. The locating board offered the towns “no specific forms, or blanks” so applicants would be “left free to submit such facts and data, in any style of form or blank, as it may deem pertinent and germane to a full and comprehensive presentation of the natural advantages and inducements which it may have to offer.”²⁷ The subsections of the document would serve as a template as many of the applications followed the format of the explanatory letter.

The locating board allowed towns fifty days from the issuance of the letter to put together their applications and submit six copies to its Austin headquarters. The due date of April 20, 1923, would allow the five members of the board a few months to review the applications prior to the rapid tour by train and automobile across the large area of western Texas as defined in the bill establishing the school.²⁸ Thirty-seven cities and towns applied for the coveted honor and ranged in population from tiny Wilson with twenty enthusiastic citizens to well-established Amarillo, boasting over fifteen thousand residents.²⁹

Prior to working on their respective applications, however, the citizens of West Texas determined to throw a Texas-sized party to celebrate the establishment of a college for their section of the state. On March 2—one day after the locating board letter—Sweetwater hosted the “West Texas Jubilee Celebration commemorating the success of the movement for a college in West Texas.”³⁰ The day included speeches from major Texas politicians, including Governor Neff, Senator Bledsoe, Representative Carpenter, and former Governor W. P. Hobby. Railroads promoted the celebration by offering special trains to Sweetwater from other West Texas towns.³¹

The San Angelo delegation met at the train station for the 7 A.M. departure. Around two hundred people made the special train, including the Boy Scout Band and the Shrine Drum Corps. The San Angelo Broom factory handed out cane-sized brooms with signs

that read "A Clean Sweep For San Angelo." Additionally, each "San Angelo delegate [would] be a sandwich [*sic*] man with a big sign front and back bearing the slogan, 'San Angelo Expects the Texas Tech.'"³² The charged climate reported in San Angelo undoubtedly found its way across the entire western half of the state.

That evening the celebration moved to the Wright Hotel in Sweetwater. Two guests from each applicant town partook in a grand banquet of roasted turkey followed by apple pie and cigars. Amon G. Carter, the general manager of the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, served as the official toastmaster of the evening.³³ Governor Neff, during his speech, discussed the importance of the manufacturing aspect of the newly created college.

The education provided at Texas Technological College means that Texas mohair will no longer go to a country where they have never seen an angora goat for manufacture and we will make our own mohair clothing. It means as well that the wool produced in our great sheep country will be manufactured in Texas and that Texas lands, Texas brains, and Texas genius will co-operate in the weaving of our own home-grown fabrics.³⁴

The Texas legislature passed and Governor Neff signed the bill creating the college with Texans' tax money in order to bolster the economic prospects of the people of Texas, not those of surrounding states.

The Board of Directors for Texas Technological College held its first meeting during the Sweetwater celebration. Eight of the nine members of the board were present for the meeting—only Mrs. Charles DeGroff from El Paso failed to attend. Governor Neff took the reins, again expressing his excitement as they stood on the cusp of "a new era in the industrial and economic history of Texas." After the governor's remarks, each member took turns giving a

short response, thanking Neff for appointing them to the board. Neff then turned the meeting to its first order of business, electing Amon Carter as the chairman and C. W. Meadows from Waco as secretary.³⁵

After the election of officers Governor Neff asked to be excused. Board member Clifford Jones, before allowing Neff to leave, proposed a resolution to “congratulate the State upon the foresight and the wisdom of His Excellency, the Honorable Pat M. Neff, Governor of Texas.” The resolution also thanked Neff for taking the time to attend the meeting and for “his careful consideration of the educational needs of the State.” With the resolution unanimously adopted, Governor Neff took his leave. Dr. J. E. Nunn of Amarillo asked about designating a president for the new college. After some disagreement the board decided to postpone that discussion for a later meeting.³⁶

The jubilant and cooperative mood that prevailed during the Sweetwater celebration gave way to jealous competitiveness within days. On March 9 the ever-vigilant Sweetwater booster and historian, Royston Campbell [R. C.] Crane, wrote a letter to Chitwood, the Sweetwater legislator, complaining about a potentially unfair situation. A personal friend of Crane, Reverend McLaurin, returned to Sweetwater after a short trip to San Angelo and reported news that a member of the locating board had scheduled a visit to San Angelo sometime around April 20. S. M. N. Marrs worked as the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and planned on visiting a Parent Teacher Association during that time.³⁷

Crane thought Marrs should have displayed “better judgment” and not visited any “contending towns until after the location [had been] decided.” More importantly, Crane argued, “the people of San Angelo and those having in charge the campaign of that town for the Texas Tech are laying their plans to be especially nice to him.” Crane continued by urging the legislator to remember that “this is an old stunt of San Angelo—that is the way she won the

Orient [Railroad] general office case over Sweetwater," in 1909. Crane refused to relinquish the deep-seated rivalry between San Angelo and Sweetwater.³⁸

Lubbock boosters also displayed questionable tactics that spring, attempting to gain an advantage. The superintendent of the Lubbock school district, M. M. Dupree, paid a surprise visit to the College of Industrial Arts in Denton where locating board member Dr. Bralley served as president. Dupree's daughter, Margaret, attended the college at the time. When she found out her father had arrived on campus, she wondered, "Why in the wide world he was coming there?" Margaret's father, in fact, had not come to visit her, but to "make Dr. Bralley know that Lubbock was a good place for [Texas Tech]." Texans around the region worked to establish clandestine connections with board members in an attempt to promote the benefits of their towns.³⁹

As town leaders labored to piece together their applications, they also sought out the endorsements of other municipalities that chose not to compete for the college. On March 24 San Antonio publicly showed its support for San Angelo. The fact "that prominent San Antonians who have wide influence with the public men of the state and who are personal friends of the members of the Tech locating board have already begun to urge San Angelo's claims" did not hurt. Support from San Antonio came even with the knowledge that Boerne, only thirty miles to the northwest, had also applied for the college. The San Antonio endorsement acknowledged the new college "should be located for the good of the state as a whole and that no place in all that wide expanse of territory quite so fills every bill or particulars as San Angelo."⁴⁰

Four days later the San Angelo Board of City Development sent an "envoy" to El Paso, the largest city in the western half of the state, to petition for its endorsement. When the San Angelo group arrived, they found the El Paso Chamber of Commerce hosting a similarly tasked delegation from Midland. While "Midland based

its plea for El Paso's approval [centered] largely upon the fact that it is nearer the border gateway," San Angelo offered a more substantive argument, citing their specific advantages in population, location, and resources.⁴¹ Less than two weeks later, El Paso issued their official position regarding the location of the new technological college—they would remain neutral. The pragmatic decision came from the fact that both Midland and San Angelo "were in El Paso trade territory. It would be bad policy to endorse either city."⁴²

Several smaller West Texas towns in the vicinity of San Angelo voiced their support for their larger neighbor, recognizing the benefit of having a large state-supported college nearby. One week in early April saw the endorsements of Marfa, Rankin, and Sanderson for San Angelo. The Marfa endorsement included the sentiment of several stockmen from that section of the state. Marfa served as the headquarters for the Highland Hereford Breeders' Association. That group felt "that Texas Tech, in order to best serve all interests, particularly livestock raising, must necessarily be located in a section where cattle, sheep and goats are raised."⁴³ Just two days later, Sanderson, with a population of around 1,400 people, threw its support behind San Angelo. Again, the community located in the Big Bend area had significant ties to the livestock industry, having hosted the quarterly meeting of the Sheep and Goat Raisers' Association earlier that year.⁴⁴

Despite the rabid competitiveness displayed by West Texas towns, the state legislature found a way to politically reunite the region. On May 21 Texas House Representatives Joe Winfree from Houston and Tom Shires from Waco proposed a bill to repeal the bill that created the Texas Technological College. The two east Texas representatives sought the repeal in order to retain the one million dollar appropriation for other budgetary needs.⁴⁵ This effort came just weeks after another special session attempt to repeal the Texas Tech bill received an unfavorable report in the House Education Committee.⁴⁶ Winfree and Shire's effort went to the House Commerce Committee, which reported negatively on the

proposal. The unanimous report killed the bill, which represented the last attempt to curtail the establishment of the college.

With the fate of the college safe from further legislative shenanigans, towns scrambled to complete their applications for the locating board. Each applicant interpreted the stated requirements of the future college's location to fit their circumstances. Vernon, located on the Oklahoma border, argued the institution "will serve the technical educational needs of the entire southwest." Undoubtedly, this would prove to be true in the sense that students from the region would sojourn to Texas to attend the school. The argument, however, did not seem to keep the best interests of Texans at heart. Backtracking, Vernon later submitted that "even if we are to consider the college a purely Texas Institution railroad connections make Vernon accessible to every part of the state." Surrounded by farmland, the Vernon application also chose to focus on the potential of the agricultural training rather than the manufacturing emphasis stressed in the original bill and subsequent rhetoric.⁴⁷

The brief for Boerne, a town located nearest to the eastern boundary as defined by the law, began with a defensive tone. "Boerne is situated west of the 98th line of longitude this being true, Boerne is entitled to just as much consideration as a possible location irrespective of how far west said applicant may be situated." Situated in a region less conducive to agriculture, Boerne focused on the goal of "instructing students along industrial lines" and suggested a cooperative system of education by employing technological experts to assist in training. The close proximity of the major population center of San Antonio "where there are industrial plants of various kinds" would prove invaluable to this end.⁴⁸

The timbre of the location's citizens appeared in several pamphlets. This quality, however, meant different things to different towns. Nearly all places made mention of their progressive citizenship. Only three of the contenders—Amarillo,

Lubbock, and San Angelo—commented on the racial makeup of their populations. These cities employed nearly identical language in declaring their overwhelmingly white populations. Amarillo boasted “practically 100% of those living in this territory are native born American citizens . . . there are few Mexicans, few colored, few foreign born, and practically no tenant class.”⁴⁹ Lubbock, while stating the same general statistic, specified its population had “only 2.5 per cent foreign-born whites and colored. Our people are pioneers and imbued with the pioneer spirit.”⁵⁰ San Angelo refrained from listing statistics, arguing “[i]ts citizenship in as large percentage as any Western city of similar size are native-born whites. It has few negroes and relatively few Mexicans.”⁵¹

The Ballinger committee presented moral conditions for their town by listing criminal statistics, urging the board to remember “the laws governing liquor, traffic, prostitution, gambling, etc., are strictly enforced in Ballinger and Runnels County. These temptations would be removed from students . . . a condition which does not exist in the larger cities.”⁵² Claude, whose application consisted of a mere two pages, listed the fact that ninety percent of its citizens were members of local churches.⁵³ Smaller towns relied on the upstanding nature of their citizens rather than their race or ethnicity.

With the information provided by the applications in hand, the locating board began its tour of the towns on July 14. In twenty-four days, with only four days’ rest, all thirty-seven applicants were to receive equal treatment. The members of the board, all named within S.B. 103, included: the chairman of the committee, S. B. Cowell, Head of the State Board of Control; S. M. N. Marrs, State Superintendent of Public Instruction; F. M. Bralley, president of the College of Industrial Arts; and W. B. Bizzill, president of the Texas Agricultural and Mechanical College.⁵⁴ William S. Sutton, acting president of the University of Texas, had recently replaced R. E. Vinson as the president of the University of Texas, and thus took his place on the locating board.

Boerne enjoyed the honor of receiving the first visit on the tour. Both Chairman Cowell and Secretary W. R. Nabours failed to be present for the event, upsetting the boosters of the Hill Country town. Despite the apparent shun, Boerne's citizens treated the members of the board to a tour of the "beauty spots on the surrounding country." Following the caravan tour, the delegation attended a luncheon at the Hill Top Hotel, after which "several citizens of Boerne and San Antonio presented the claims of the Kendall County city as the site for the prospective college." The board, after spending nearly the entire day in Boerne, departed to spend the rest of the weekend in Austin before continuing the trip.⁵⁵

The trip resumed when the board arrived in Lampasas—the easternmost applicant for the West Texas college. Again, "due to a slight indisposition which necessitated his remaining in Austin," the chairman was absent. Secretary Nabours, however, accompanied the rest of the board. Upon arrival, the Lampasas hosts took their guests on a sight-seeing tour, stopping just before lunchtime at Hancock Springs. The members of the board, excluding Superintendent Marrs, "enjoyed a swim in the cool spring water of the West Texas city." During lunch at Anderson Park, Dr. Sutton joked that the board "had only two witnesses before us so far and we must hear the others before you will even have a chance to get mad at us."⁵⁶

At Brady, the next stop, leaders declared the day a public holiday, allowing nearly the entire city to celebrate the arrival of the board. Former McCulloch County legislator Tom J. Beasley boarded the train a few stops before the board arrived in Brady to distribute a special edition of its newspaper to the members. One important aspect of the trip involved the fact that Chairman Cowell, who finally joined the board in Brady, was completely blind. Hamilton Wright, a journalist who traveled with the board, noted that he would go around with his "gold-headed walking stick" and have the other members of the board describe the landscape: "this is a bunch of trees here, and over here is so-and-so and over here is level, black land and so forth. And he's the one who made the

decisions, too.”⁵⁷ The municipal band, along with several hundred citizens, awaited the arrival of the train. After a tour of the “‘million-gallon-a-minute’ artesian well” and a barbecue luncheon, the board continued on.⁵⁸

In contrast to the jubilant attitude of the Brady visit, the next candidate, Brownwood, ensured “every minute was utilized in making the college arbiters conversant with the situation here.” After a quick breakfast, the Brownwood boosters ushered the board to the proposed site and included a stop at the high-pressure water tank on Round Mountain. While covering the general topics as well as typical Texas agricultural endeavors, Brownwood citizens took special care to describe their pecan industry. They maintained that their town sat in the midst of a region of Texas where “more pecans are raised and shipped annually than from all the rest of the United States outside of Texas” and “is the second largest shipping point for pecans in the world.” This unique situation, angled toward the industrial production aspect of the proposed college, was perhaps desired to create a pecan research center of a world-class scale.⁵⁹

Continuing with the business-like attitude of the Brownwood presenters, San Angelo worked to capitalize on its time with the board. The largest city on the tour up to that point, San Angelo’s board members sought to impress the locating committee with their largess.⁶⁰ The first of its two sites offered included a donation of three thousand acres on top of the requisite two thousand required by the legislation. Tours of the many dams impounding an estimated “five or six billion gallons” of spring water and livestock facilities rounded out the official pitch. San Angelo National Bank president Charles W. Hobbs organized a dinner at the Country Club, which a journalist described as “one of the most enjoyable affairs that the board has yet experienced.”⁶¹

The locating board spent Friday night in San Angelo and intended to travel to Midland the next morning. The San Angelo delegation agreed to deliver the members of the board to Sterling City, a town half the distance to Midland from San Angelo.

Citizens there treated the locators to a barbecue lunch despite the fact they had not applied for the college. A large thunderstorm disrupted the event, and at the same time the automobiles driving from Midland to retrieve the board members became stranded and arrived two hours later than scheduled. Because of the weather delays, the board determined to inspect Midland on Sunday, which had originally been set aside as a day of rest, in order to maintain the tight schedule.⁶²

The Sunday inspection of Midland included the usual discussion of weather conditions and water supplies. The delegation admitted "the rainfall is not as much as we would like and the lack of it in sufficient quantities is all that is keeping this country from coming to the front." Midland had no surface water, which they argued to their advantage by reminding the board that meant they had a much smaller chance to breed malaria-causing mosquitoes. Being located farther west than any other applicant, Midlanders believed their city fit the spirit of the law establishing a college for West Texas most aptly. The most creative argument involved the finances of the University of Texas. Trying to appeal to Dr. Sutton, one member of the Midland boosters noted the University of Texas lands, which supply significant financial backing to the institution, completely surrounded Midland County. The mere presence of the new college in the vicinity of those lands would increase their value "from \$3 to \$4 an acre."⁶³

On July 23 the locating board arrived in Big Spring to hear the thirteenth pitch in nine days. Asked how they felt about occupying the thirteenth slot, a traditionally unlucky number, the Big Spring crowd cited the fact that "it was President Wilson's lucky numeral . . . and from here on out, they declare, they intend to make it theirs." The delegation presented the locating committee with a general tour of the town and stopped at each of their three proposed sites. Afterward, they journeyed to the Masonic building where several prominent Big Spring businessmen boasted about the advantages of their city, most focusing on the central location of the town. Big Spring, they argued, lay "at the dividing line of the great

plains section to the north with its millions of acres of fertile lands . . . and the great Edwards Plateau region to the south with its great live stock interests.”⁶⁴ That evening the Chamber of Commerce hosted a barbecue chicken dinner where guests would “get a half chicken and other stuff.”⁶⁵

Upon the board’s arrival in Sweetwater, Representative Chitwood worked to convince it that his hometown represented the best location for the new college. Chitwood stated “his interpretation of the act passed by the Legislature was that the college should be located ‘not so much where it can best be served, but to a larger extent where it can be of greatest service.’”⁶⁶ This view operated as the starting point for Sweetwater’s argument that its perfectly central location in West Texas would be of the greatest service to the region. In addition to occupying the geographic center of the section, Sweetwater stated that three of the five railroads of West Texas—the Texas & Pacific, the Santa Fe, and the Orient—intersected in their city, thus providing unprecedented transportation opportunities.

Two Taylor County towns saw the locating committee next. With three private colleges and having stood at the center of the college locating scandal just six years earlier, the first, Abilene, had little chance of securing Texas Tech. In an attempt to bolster the odds of having the new school in Taylor County, Abilene offered free water from Lake Abilene to nearby Buffalo Gap if the village should win the college. H. B. Cook countered the idea, explaining that Buffalo Gap was too isolated. He told of the change that had occurred since the time when “you could not in your whole lifetime have counted the number of buffaloes, Indians and antelope that inhabited this country or passed through the gap.” Cook warned that the board should place the college in Buffalo Gap or another small town like it to prevent jealousies from arising in the larger cities of West Texas. He concluded by stating, “you gentlemen are due for some of the darnedest cussing you ever heard if you are not careful.”⁶⁷

July 31 saw Wilson, claiming a population of only twenty souls, and Lubbock make their claims. Harry Hewlett of Wilson felt overwhelmed when the locating board caravan of what "seemed like forty or fifty cars" came through the village.⁶⁸ The tiny town, however, offered three times the amount of land required by the bill, suggesting that the locating board could choose the two thousand acres they preferred "without disturbing any individual or moving any fence."⁶⁹ On the way from Wilson to Lubbock, the locating board made a stop at Slaton, the home of Representative Baldwin. A large contingent of Slatonites traveled with the locating board from Wilson to their town and hosted a "brief meeting" with a "program for entertainment of the visitors" in the City Hall auditorium. Lubbock County Judge W. A. Koons, "a personal friend of Mr. Bralley, a member of the committee," accompanied the locating board.⁷⁰

Senator Bledsoe greeted the committee upon their arrival in Lubbock. The principle author of the bill who "had the pull" to influence Texas politics worked as the foremost booster for his hometown.⁷¹ The daughters of Senator Bledsoe and Superintendent Dupree, both students of the College of Industrial Arts, rode in a car with their president, Dr. Bralley, as they toured the town and proposed site.⁷² Along the way to the site the procession stopped at an irrigation well that had been left open so a "big flow of water" would be clearly audible for the visually-impaired chairman.⁷³ Lubbock had taken on the atmosphere of "a circus day . . . entertainment was in reality fantastical. The Chamber of Commerce had instructed newspaper writers to take what they wanted, no matter what it was. Lubbock wanted publicity, and she was not disappointed."⁷⁴ Bledsoe "stressed the fact that the Legislature, in the act creating the college, imperatively commanded the locaters of the institution to pay especial attention to the future trend of growth in the vast territory." Although that language did not actually appear in S.B. 103, Bledsoe continued by pointing out that Lubbock's population had "increased more than 200 per cent during the last ten years."⁷⁵ According to the federal census, Lubbock had grown by fifty-two percent from 1910 to 1920—going from a

population of 1,928 to 4,041.⁷⁶ That represents a significant increase but far from the two hundred percent touted.

The Lubbock delegation sought to have the locating board consider the distance their town had to travel to reach a state supported college. They argued that students from the South Plains district had to travel further than any other section of the western portion of the state. They cited the locations of schools in Alpine, Stephenville, Denton, Arlington, and even Austin as being near to applicants from west-central Texas.⁷⁷ However, the South Plains had a state-supported college located in Canyon, under one hundred miles north of Lubbock. The vastness of the western half of the state meant some students would have to travel long distances regardless of the location of the new school. West-central Texas, from which many applications originated, had no public colleges, despite Lubbock's claim.

The next morning the committee drove east to Crosbyton, the seat of Crosby County. The boosters of that village organized "[o]ne of the most unique things that [had] fallen before the eyes of the board . . . from a point a good half mile from the center of the city clear on to the public square" stood a "gauntlet" of over fifty boy scouts, each of whom held a different agricultural product grown in Crosby County. Crosbyton offered the familiar arguments of substantial growth, unlimited water, and extraordinary agricultural opportunities. Additionally, they wanted the board to consider the proximity of "substantial building materials in large quantities."⁷⁸

While the locating board spent that night in Spur, Texas, Clifford B. Jones, a member of the Texas Tech Board of Directors and future president of the college began to "put in a lot of telephone calls back to Lubbock."⁷⁹ The Lubbock delegation, in their attempt to meet the very requirements that Senator Bledsoe believed he had carefully tailored to his hometown, failed to produce the two thousand acres required by the law. Jones' call to Lubbock indicates the locating committee gave special

consideration to the hometown of Senator Bledsoe even though thirty-six other towns managed to produce sites that met the requirements. The next morning members of the Lubbock delegation worked feverously to purchase the eighty acres that lay in the middle of their proposed site.⁸⁰

In Plainview, a town with a population of about four thousand, the promoters produced a complicated series of mathematical computations to show the accessibility of their community to the rest of Texas. They calculated the time it would take to travel from each applicant to all of the other contenders and averaged that time. By doing this they sought to show the board that their town, which lay halfway between Lubbock and Amarillo, was less isolated than it appeared. During the conclusion to his presentation, Judge L. S. Kinder rehashed the accessibility of his town, but then conceded "if we should grant that it was the most inaccessible of all we would still maintain that the overwhelming advantages . . . make it the best location for [Texas Tech]."⁸¹ Probably working against its favor, Plainview already boasted Wayland Baptist College, a private school established in 1908.

Amarillo lay claim to the largest population by far. The city presented what Hamilton Wright, who lived in Plainview, considered the "most liberal offer of all the competing towns."⁸² But the populous Panhandle city had two major factors working against it. First, the one state-supported school in the Panhandle lay just twenty miles south in Canyon. The locating board would have certainly been accused of foul play had they placed the highly desired college so near another state school. The other issue affecting Amarillo was its geographic location. Being the furthest north of all the other applicants and so near the New Mexico and Oklahoma borders, there would have been significant difficulties justifying how that represented the best choice for the people of western Texas. The committee spent Friday night in Amarillo, then proceeded to Claude the next morning.

On Monday, August 6th in the middle of the night, “a big-powered motor car pulled into Sweetwater just as the fast Texas & Pacific night train to Fort Worth was pulling out. Four men leaped from the car crawled over the partly closed vestibules and disappeared inside.” Senator Bledsoe was one of the four men who rushed to catch that train. The Lubbock delegation had finally secured the rights to the land they had overlooked in their presentation. Twenty individuals, including some non-residents, owned the missing tract of land, which consisted of eighty acres. Staying in Quanah that night, “the board told the [Lubbock] committee to get their new acreage in proper form to present it to the board officially before Wednesday morning . . . [and] with this additional acreage, she would be selected as the home of the Texas Tech.” The citizens of Lubbock scraped together “\$60,000 to guarantee its purchase and the deal was closed in time for a Lubbock committee to rush to Fort Worth Monday Night with the deed.”⁸³

Despite having already made a decision, the locating board paid the last scheduled visit to Vernon the next day. The town of 5,142 people, located just a few miles from the Oklahoma border, rested its argument on the college serving the entire southwest rather than being established for the benefit of Texans. While the entire region would stand to benefit from the research done at the college, concerns about other states would matter far less for Texan taxpayers—naturally Texans would come first. Vernon boosters also discussed the ample facilities the town offered for maintaining a large student population.⁸⁴

For most, including the press, the focus had shifted toward the actual selection days prior to the Vernon visit. This discussion began the day after the board listened to the Amarillo pitch. Perhaps that city represented the last credible contender, or the press corps simply looked forward to the end of a long trip. On Sunday, August 5th, board members argued about the steps they would take following Vernon. A majority of the locating committee sought to travel to Fort Worth “immediately after the completion of the

itinerary to thresh the problem out.” Chairman Cowell voiced the only opposition. He thought the members should travel to their respective homes for a week to ten days, then meet again in Austin to discuss their ideas about the location. That afternoon Secretary Nabours announced that the locators would travel to Fort Worth to confer on the final decision. Nabours urged towns to refrain from sending delegations to Fort Worth and explicitly stated they would “not consider any supplementary data or briefs after Tuesday.”⁸⁵

On August 8th the train carrying the board arrived in Fort Worth, and deliberations began at the Texas Hotel. The majority of the committee that opted to go straight to Fort Worth needed time to convince Cowell, the only holdout, to give Lubbock an uncontested vote. After a few hours Secretary Nabours left the meeting room and announced to the press that the board had come to an unanimous decision at two o'clock that afternoon. Lubbock would be the home to the new college. General congratulations and celebrations followed the announcement. Without delay D. E. Sims from Paint Rock “presented a petition to all the contesting towns agreeing that they would stand by the decision of the board . . . Representative[s] of all towns present signed after considerable deliberation.”⁸⁶

Within a few days the political implications and geographic reality of the decision began to take its toll on the attitudes of some Texans. One journalist complained “the great middle section of Texas is not served by a great State institution. Like the matter is not over.” The writer went on to say, “Perhaps the Tech will now get a half dozen recruits from the cowboys of the Littlefield Ranch lying between the location of the school and New Mexico.”⁸⁷ A poet from Ballinger wrote a short piece describing his feeling on the subject:

Thank heaven the agony is over,
Praise God the Tech is located.
Thirty-four towns are sadly in mourning,
While Lubbock is greatly elated.

No doubt you've heard of the Texas Tech.
That famous school on the line of New Mex.
It's out on the treeless plain,
In the land of sandstorms and sand.
Where the Coyotes yell,
Cowboys raise L,
And the Prairie dog kneels,
On the back of his heels,
And fervently prays for rain.⁸⁸

In addition to these quips, some towns genuinely argued that the locating board did not comply with the spirit of the law. J. A. Bradbury wrote in the Sweetwater newspaper that a serious mistake had been made, much like the mistake in locating the state school in Canyon, Texas, years earlier. He suggested "the college is not located at Lubbock because Lubbock is not and cannot be found in the 'must' of the bill what was passed and became a law." Bradbury believed the decision should be nullified because the board failed to adhere to the conditions set forth. He continued, "No territory east, north or south of Sweetwater will support the dislocated Tech at Lubbock. Why not get busy and correct the mistake now? What is popularity worth when principle is at stake? Until the 'must' of the law is complied with, it must go down in history that wrong has been substituted for right."⁸⁹ According to Bradbury, Representative Chitwood also expressed concerns that the locating board had made the same mistake as in 1917's creation of the West Texas Normal College at Canyon by putting the college on the Plains.

In what must have seemed like a reenactment from that debacle, a committee of dissatisfied Texans met at San Saba to discuss the possibility of setting aside the decision. The dissent stemmed from the knowledge that the "board had settled upon Lubbock prior to its tour of the West."⁹⁰ The actions of the board after their trip to Lubbock suggested they had selected the town prior to the end of the tour—despite it failing to meet the basic land requirement set forth by the law. A group in Brownwood stated

emphatically, "it is shown that crooked politics was mixed in this school affair, just as crooked political manipulators are the determining factors in nearly everything attempted in Texas."⁹¹

Two of the four principal legislators who worked on the final draft of the bill hailed from Lubbock. Representative Carpenter's district lay outside of the geographic location prescribed by the bill. The political pull from Bledsoe and Baldwin overwhelmed any claim Chitwood may have made for his constituents. As a concession, however, Chitwood became the business manager for the new college, a small token of political patronage for his defeat in the locating battle.⁹² The other towns that fought what they believed to be a fair battle were, in fact, just pawns used to induce Lubbock's leaders to produce a generous offer.

In the decades that have followed people have asked, "Why Lubbock?"⁹³ The answer proved as evident to the people of West Texas in 1923 as it should today. Senator Bledsoe and Representative Baldwin seized the initiative for a West Texas College at exactly the right time to allow their influence to determine its location. Bledsoe's midnight drive across the western half of Texas betrays his deep involvement in the location of the college. One has difficulty believing all of the applicant towns would have been afforded the same opportunity to rectify a botched proposal. Ultimately, Bledsoe and Baldwin did the right thing for their constituents. Influential men from every town attempted to exert whatever influence they could muster to affect the location of the college. The ruse of a genuine competition caused towns to expend an excess of time and for a lost cause.

Notes

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³Hamilton Wright, *A History of the Texas Tech College: Official Story of Effort to Get the College and of Final Success* (Abilene, TX: Pender Company, 1926), 9.

⁴"Neff Vetoes West Texas A.&M.[sic] but Signs Bill for University Expansion," *Dallas Morning News*, April 2, 1921.

⁵Homer Dale Wade, *Establishment of Texas Technological College, 1916-1913* (Lubbock: Texas Tech Press, 1956), 58.

⁶Wade, *Establishment of Texas Tech*, 60.

⁷"Editor Objects to Independent A.&M. [sic]," *Dallas Morning News*, September 5, 1922.

⁸"Proposed West Texas State College," *Dallas Morning News*, January 19, 1923; *Journal of the House of Representatives of the Regular Session of the Thirty-Eighth Legislature* (Austin: Von Boeckmann-Jones, 1923), 84 (hereafter 38th House Journal).

⁹38th House Journal, 216.

¹⁰Lewis T. Carpenter, memorandum, in Wade, *Establishment of Texas Tech*, 145.

¹¹Wade, *Establishment of Texas Tech*, 80.

¹²*Ibid.*, 82.

¹³*Ibid.*, 83.

¹⁴Burke Mathes, interview by David Murrah, July 30, 1975, Tape One, Side One, SWC.

¹⁵"House Engrosses New College Bill," *San Angelo Standard*, January 26, 1923.

¹⁶"Texas 'Tech' Bill Passed by Senate," *San Angelo Standard*, January 29, 1923.

¹⁷38th House Journal, 494-5.

¹⁸Senate Bill No. 103, Texas Technological College Locating Board Records, 1923 and 1938, SWC.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰*Cotton Production in the United States: Crop of 1920* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1921), 4.

²¹*Abstract of the Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1923), 760.

²²*Ibid.*, 791.

²³Dana Magill, "William Harrison Bledsoe and the Founding of Texas Tech University," *West Texas Historical Association Year Book LXXVIII* (2002): 48.

²⁴Harve Kendrick, interview by Joanna Shurbet, December 12, 1975, Tape One, Side One, SWC.

²⁵"To All Applicants," Office of the Locating Board Texas Technological College, R. C. Crane Collection, SWC.

²⁶Clifford L. Gibbs, "Establishment of Texas Technological College, 1916-1923" (master's thesis, Texas Tech University, 1939), 43.

²⁷"To All Applicants."

²⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹Texas Almanac: City Population History from 1850-2000." *Texas Almanac*, accessed March 6, 2013. <http://www.texasalmanac.com/sites/default/files/images/CityPopHist%20web.pdf>.

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³¹"Crowd to Jubilee," *San Angelo Standard*, March 1, 1923.

³²"Special Train to Jubilee Meeting," *San Angelo Standard*, March 1, 1923.

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³⁴"Service as Ideal Stressed by Neff," *San Angelo Standard*, March 4, 1923.

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³⁶Ibid.

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⁴⁴"Here's Sanderson," *San Angelo Standard*, April 8, 1923.

⁴⁵"Repeal Tech Bill Proposed in House," *San Angelo Standard*, May 21, 1923.

⁴⁶"Tech Repeal Bill Killed in House," *San Angelo Standard*, May 6, 1923.

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⁴⁸Boerne Application, 1, Texas Technological College Locating Board Records, 1923 and 1938, SWC.

⁴⁹Amarillo Application, 4, Texas Technological College Locating Board Records, 1923 and 1938, SWC.

⁵⁰Lubbock Application, 22, Texas Technological College Locating Board Records, 1923 and 1938, SWC.

⁵¹San Angelo Application, 14, Texas Technological College Locating Board Records, 1923 and 1938, SWC.

⁵²Ballinger Application, 8, Texas Technological College Locating Board Records, 1923 and 1938, SWC.

⁵³Claude Application, 2, Texas Technological College Locating Board Records, 1923 and 1938, SWC.

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⁵⁶"Locating Board Visits Lampasas," *Dallas Morning News*, July 17, 1923.

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⁶³"Locating Board Visits Midland," *Dallas Morning News*, July 23, 1923.

⁶⁴"Big Spring Bids for Tech College," *Dallas Morning News*, July 24, 1923.

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⁶⁶"Sweetwater and Colorado Visited," *Dallas Morning News*, July 25, 1923.

⁶⁷"Buffalo Gap Presents Claims for College," *Dallas Morning News*, July 26, 1923.

⁶⁸Harry H. Hewlett, interview by Richard Mason, March 31, 1982, Tape One, Side Two, SWC.

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⁷²Dupree, interview.

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⁷⁴Hamilton Wright, "Story of Visitation of Texas Technological Locating Committee to Various Competing Towns in West Texas," in Wade, *Establishment of Texas Tech*, 154.

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