

1958 and 1959: A new campus for St. Joseph Academy

Earlier columns have described the lengthy efforts, over several years, to obtain funding for construction of the new campus for St. Joseph Academy. After funding was finally obtained in 1858, architects were hired and began designing the new buildings for the school.

Before construction could begin, it was necessary to extend Ringgold Street across the resaca to provide an entrance to the site, which required building a bridge and an extension of Ringgold Street. It was also necessary to provide water and sewer lines to the site.

Construction began on three buildings, which were designed to provide the facilities needed by the school: office space for the school administration, living quarters for the brothers, a chapel, a kitchen and dining room, a library and 14 classrooms.

One two story building provided areas for the living quarters of the brothers, a chapel, a kitchen, a dining room and the library.

The second building contained eight classrooms, and the third building contained six classrooms and office space for the school administration.

In addition to these buildings, a covered open area was built housing a recreation area and a basketball court with a wooden floor. This unique area was also used at times for school meetings. A grant of \$17,000 by the Kenedy Foundation provided funding for this project.

When construction was completed the architects were pleased with their work and with the final result, which was entered in several competitions, winning awards and commendations. The school even had the distinction of being cited in Time magazine with a photograph. The total cost of the new facilities was reported to have been around \$520,000.

The construction was completed in early 1959, and the move from downtown to the new campus took place in March of that year. It was accomplished during a two-day period, with most of the work being done by faculty and students. They boxed up library books, loaded furniture and equipment onto trucks, and delivered these items to the new location. Most of the furnishings came from downtown, but some new furniture was acquired.

The faculty and students also helped with landscaping of the new campus, planting trees and shrubbery, and felt a sense of accomplishment from their efforts.

In the 1940s three military barracks had been acquired from the government after Fort Brown had closed, which had been put to good use at the downtown location. These three buildings were now located at the new location. One was used as a band hall, one was used for storage of athletic equipment and one was used as a store room.

During the construction of the new facility and the moving of the furniture and equipment from Elizabeth Street, Marist Brother William Vessels served as principal of St. Joseph. He and Brother Paul Urban, a long time faculty member, worked together on development of the new campus. Brother William was responsible for dealing with construction contracts and approvals, while Brother Paul managed the finances and assisted with overseeing the construction work. These two capable men are deserving of credit for their accomplishments in bringing the construction of the facilities to a successful conclusion, and in assisting in the move to the new location.

The move to the new school was the fulfillment of long years of dreaming, anticipation and much effort, finally making it happen. It marked the beginning of a new period, which paved the way for future growth and further improvements. These are reflected today in the educational programs, student activities and physical facilities at the attractive campus of St. Joseph Academy.

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