

## VALLEY & STATE

# St. Joseph: Progress in the 1920s, slower times in the '30s

This column continues the story of St. Joseph College, in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1924, the people of Brownsville responded generously to a drive for funds to improve the library of the St. Joseph College, making it possible to acquire a substantial number of books and two encyclopedias.

During that same period, the first school bus was purchased with money raised from sale of tickets to people who had attended the school play.

By 1925, St. Joseph had been in operation for a period of 60 years and was now a well-established facility. During these years, the faculty was made up entirely of Marist brothers. There were no lay teachers. Some of the brothers held college degrees, while others did not. During the summer months, the brothers worked to improve their own educational qualifications by attending St. Mary's University in San Antonio and other schools.

A three-story brick building was added to campus facilities in 1926. This building housed the newly-established high school, a library and auditorium, and it provided living accommodations for boarding students. The first two floors housed classrooms, the library, the science department and an auditorium. The boarding students lived on the third floor.

High school classes were offered for the first time, with an enrollment of 15 students. During that same period, a school band was organized, conducted by an Army musician from Fort Brown.

In 1929, the high school seniors established a school paper, "The Pioneer," which was published every six weeks. Also, a catalog was published, describing the full curriculum of the high school. A school play was held in the Junior College auditorium, performed before an audience of more than 600 people.

The name was changed from St. Joseph College to St. Joseph Academy in 1930. That same year saw the graduation of the first high school class, and the enrollment reached a high of 259 students. The academy was recognized by the Texas Department of Education with a ranking of First Class Four Year School.

Citizens of Brownsville continued to provide support. Among those who were recognized as donors were Mrs. Ruth Holland, Mr. and Mrs. J. K. Wells, Mr. and Mrs. R. E. Holland, Joseph Webb, Mr. and Mrs. R. M. Dalzell, Mr. E. de la Garza, Mr. Antonio Barreda, Mrs. Sostenes Saenz, and Mr. J. G. Fernandez.

But the 1930s saw the beginning of the Great Depression. The population growth of Brownsville virtually stopped for several years, and economic times became difficult. Enrollment dropped at times, and the school struggled with financial problems, as did most everyone in the community.

In 1932, during the height of the Great Depression, enrollment dropped to 192 students. But the brothers were able to deal with these problems, and classes and other activities continued as before.

At the beginning of the 1933-34 school year, the faculty consisted of nine brothers, and the school began offering education from the first grade through high school. The brothers all had heavy classroom loads, some teaching two grade levels and others teaching a variety of subjects.

The opening of school was postponed in September 1933 due to the arrival of two hurricanes that hit Brownsville the same month, causing much damage. The brothers reported that the community suffered terrific damage, and the city was without running water for two weeks and without electricity for three weeks. The brothers also reported they had fought the raging wind all one night, but that damage to the school was comparatively light.

This story will continue next week.

Carl Chilton can be reached at [carlruth@aol.com](mailto:carlruth@aol.com).



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CARL CHILTON