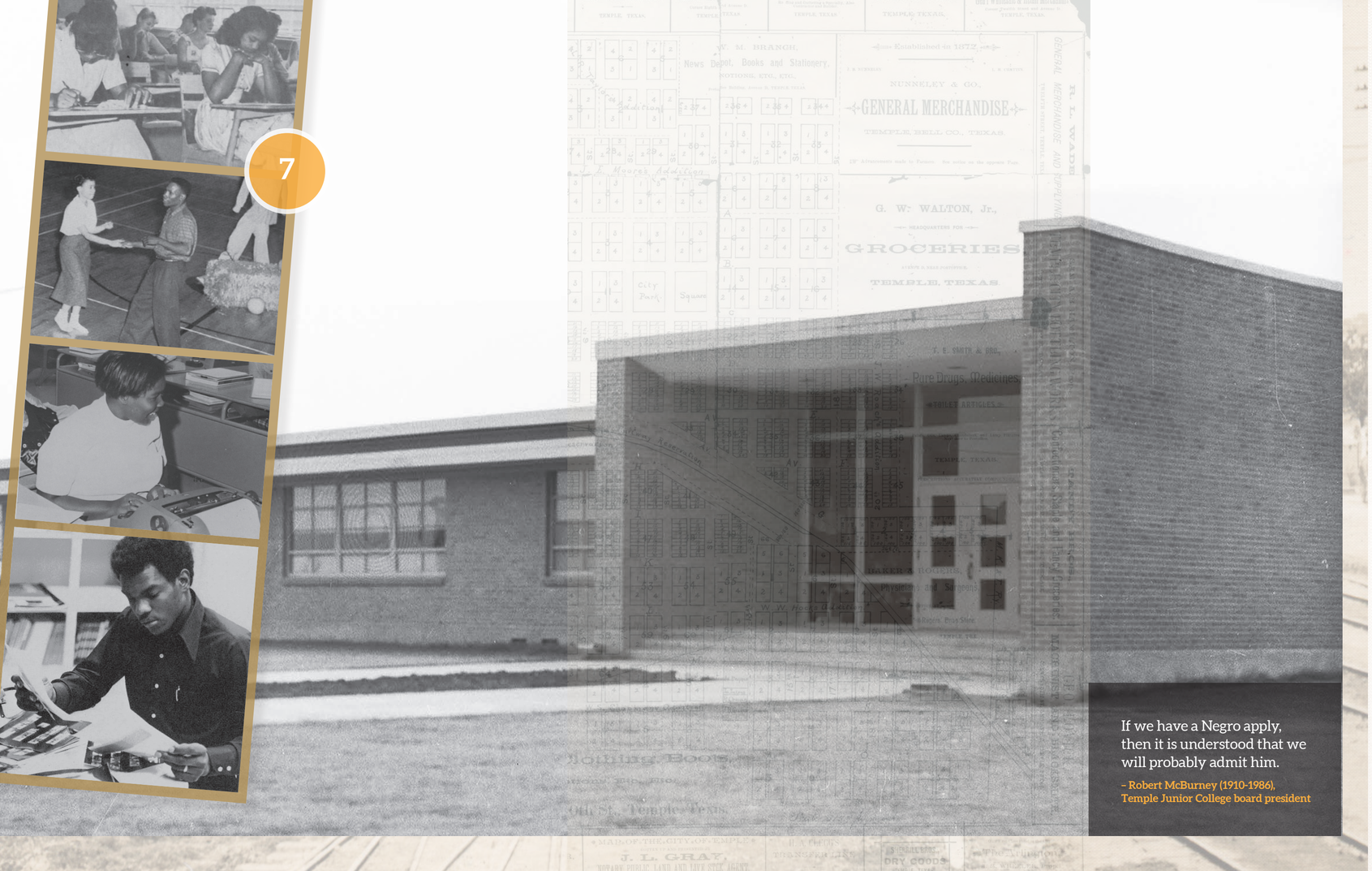

Chapter 7

Integrating the College

With the 1955 departure of Selman Perry Cowan (1909-1999), Newman Smith (1907-1994), Temple High principal since 1949, was elevated to the dual position of school superintendent and college president.

Mr. Smith had a lot on his plate as he moved into the president's role: passing a bond issue to fund a separate campus for the college, overseeing construction of the new campus, and planning the move to the new campus.

He also had one other piece of unfinished business: integrating the college. Mr. Smith told trustees he was determined to comply with the Supreme Court's 1954 decision on integration – a move that Mr. Cowan had intently avoided during his tenure.

Mr. Smith earned a bachelor's degree in mathematics at Texas A&I University in Kingsville and a master's degree in mathematics at The University of Texas at Austin. He had come to Temple after serving as a principal in Beaumont and Denison public schools.

Robert Barton McBurney (1910-1986), board president and a 1931 graduate of Temple Junior College, showed the essential leadership needed to make sure the integration process would be fair and in compliance. At the time, Bell County had a split personality. President Harry S Truman had ordered desegregation of the armed forces in 1948, and Fort Hood's on-post schools began admitting all students regardless of race.

Mr. Smith told trustees he was determined to comply with the Supreme Court's 1954 decision on integration.

However, Truman's order did not fix the issue of segregation off-post in non-military communities. Living under restrictive segregation laws, many Texans were slow to accept racial equality, including those in Bell County. Army facilities were open to all races, but beyond the post's fences was an ambiguously restrictive situation.

Dunbar High School served African American students in Temple but there was no college they could attend until Temple Junior College was integrated in 1957. (Courtesy of the Temple Public Library)

Newman Smith (Courtesy of Rose Anne Brasher Special Collections, Temple College Libraries)

A half dozen African American students applied to Temple Junior College for admission for the 1955 fall term. College trustees again faced the issue of integration and balked at a decision. Mr. McBurney appointed two trustees to develop a policy for admitting black students: healthcare administrator Arthur "Butch" Fowler (1917-2002) and Scott & White orthopedic surgeon Hanes Brindley Sr., M.D., (1918-1990). However, by late 1956, no plan was in place because trustees said they lacked clear direction from the state.

By fall 1955, Killeen's public school district integrated its elementary grades, while Temple public schools remained segregated. Just before the start of school in fall 1956, Killeen trustees unanimously voted to allow black students to attend Killeen High School. African American teens were allowed to choose whether to attend the all-black high schools in Temple or Belton, if they preferred, or attend the integrated Killeen High School. Previously, black students were bussed 70 miles round-trip to all-black high schools – Harris in Belton and Dunbar in Temple. Now they had a choice.

The Killeen trustees' decision was momentous but expected. On-post elementary schools had been integrated since Truman's executive order. Integrating the higher grades was a logical decision. Thus, KISD was among the earliest districts in the state to adopt integration as its policy, and the first in Bell County.

College trustees wrestled over whether to integrate. To complicate the issue, the Legislature in 1957 passed a bill withholding state funds to integrated school districts. Trustees were threatened with severe financial hardship if the college integrated (The measure was later ruled unconstitutional by the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals). After much debate and several studies that produced no clear direction, Mr. McBurney raised ethical issues: He maintained that integrating the college was the morally right decision.

After much debate and discussion, trustees concluded that since the college began, African Americans had paid taxes to support the college but they were barred from admittance because of their skin color.

"We have obligated ourselves to those people in that we do not have equal facilities for them, and they pay a junior college tax as well as anybody else," Mr. McBurney said. Other trustees concurred that the practice of "taxation without registration" was indefensible since the county had no comparable black college to serve them.

Trustee Joe Everton (1906-1975), an attorney, said that considering protests and strikes on other U.S. campuses, he preferred to place his trust in the college's student body to accept the inevitability of integration and to accept black students on campus. "The majority of students have sense [although] there might be some concern on the part of the parents. The Supreme Court has made a decision. I would rather go ahead and admit them rather than be forced into it," Mr. Everton said.

Dr. Brindley countered, saying that he had talked to "a number of Negroes, and they were interested in equal facilities only." He was reticent to change the way the college had always operated.

Trustees developed no policy, but gave tacit approval to admit all students regardless of race. "If we have a Negro apply, then it is understood that we will probably admit him," Mr. McBurney said.

EQUALITY IN SCHOLARSHIPS

But college trustees soon faced a related issue: Are African American students entitled to scholarships like their white classmates?

Temple Junior College had a longstanding custom of awarding tuition scholarships to valedictorians graduating from all Bell County high schools. However, graduates of African American high schools were excluded. When the valedictorian of the Bartlett Negro High School applied for admission and a scholarship in 1957, the trustees again debated the issue. Minutes from the meeting simply stated, "The board authorized [Hubert Dawson, college dean] to answer in the affirmative a question from the Bartlett Negro High School as to whether or not Temple Junior College would award a scholarship to the valedictorian from its senior class." In other words, all valedictorians, regardless of skin color, would receive tuition scholarships.

Juanita Jones Glover of Bartlett was the first African American student to graduate from Temple Junior College.

ACCIDENTAL HEROINES

The Granderson sisters, recent high school graduates, were well-regarded; teachers complemented them for their diligent work and eagerness to learn. The two siblings wanted to go to college.

The daughters of Roosevelt (1911-1984) and Jessie Lue Gilleon Granderson (1918-2007) of Temple, Rosie Lee Granderson and Elner Lue Granderson (1939-1998) were no different from the thousands of students who had attended Temple Junior College in its first quarter century.

Except for one thing: The Granderson sisters were 1956 honor graduates of Dunbar High School, Temple's African American high school when segregation was lawful in all Texas schools from elementary grades to colleges.

The U.S. Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education in May 1954 outlawed segregated education and said "separate but equal was not equal." Several African American students from Bell County requested admission to the college for the fall 1954 term, but their applications were in limbo as college trustees in June 1954 decided not to decide. They said they awaited more instructions from the Texas Education Agency and the Legislature.

After college trustees finally agreed to accept African American students, the Granderson sisters applied for admission, were accepted without question, and registered for full-time classes in January 1957 — just like all other students. As the sisters paid their tuition, they promised to do well and work hard, as if to assuage the nervous white population. "We are going to be as good students as possible," Rosie Granderson told the *Temple Daily Telegram*, "and I believe we will not have any trouble."

She was right. She and Elner attended classes and participated in school activities, just like all other students. The sisters said they planned to take basic courses before enrolling at Prairie View College (now Prairie View A&M University).

Rosie Granderson said she and her sister would not have been able to further their education if they had not been able to attend Temple Junior College. "We are children from a large family with many children, and we just didn't have the money to spend," she said, adding that their mother, a single parent, worked as a mess attendant at Fort Hood to support her children.

By September 1957, more than a half dozen African-Americans were enrolled, as illustrated in that year's college yearbook, the *Templar*. From then on, the transition from segregated to integrated campus went smoothly with no protests or interruptions.

PROMOTING EQUALITY

Linda Faye Moore Smith (1949-2016) is a good example of what happens when education is offered equally to all.

Ms. Moore Smith graduated with honors in 1967 from Dunbar High School and enrolled at Temple Junior College to study sociology. She went on to earn a bachelor of science degree in social work from Texas Woman's University, a master of public administration degree from the School of Public Affairs, University of Colorado at Denver, and a master of arts degree from the Institute of Urban Affairs, University of Texas at Arlington. She also earned several certifications in human resource development and worked as a human resources director for Travis County and several state agencies.

Ms. Moore Smith spent many years of her professional career working with the Urban League, a national organization that promotes and ensures equality, economic and social justice for African Americans. She was selected by Vernon Jordan, former president of the National Urban League, to join the New York staff in 1979.

Prior to that, Ms. Moore Smith served as assistant director of the Houston Urban League and started the Austin Urban League, where she became executive director. Other work experiences included assistant director of the Greater Dallas Community Relations Commission and director of the Guardian ad Litem Program of Boulder County, Colorado, an agency organized to address the problems of child abuse.

Linda Faye Moore as pictured in 1969 Templar.

With that, racial segregation quietly and officially ended at the college. Juanita Jones Glover (1941-2019) of Bartlett was the first African-American student to graduate from Temple College in 1959. She went on to earn a bachelor's degree from Prairie View A&M and completed additional studies in early childhood education at Stephen F. Austin University. Mrs. Glover taught in Columbus and Granger school systems and supervised several Head Start Education programs for young children.

Temple Junior College was among several Texas schools and colleges that had quickly integrated soon after the Supreme Court's decision. Thus, Texas was one of the leaders in desegregation throughout the South. By 1964, Texas accounted for about 60 percent of the desegregated school districts in the South and for more than half of all African American students attending integrated schools in the South.

After the opening of the new campus and integration of the college, Mr. Smith refocused his attention to the public schools in 1959. He would be the last person to hold dual roles as college president and public school superintendent. Trustees looked for someone who could lead the newly independent college.

AFRICAN AMERICAN GRADUATE GIVES BACK AS A LONG-TIME TRUSTEE

As employee relations manager for WilsonArt in the early 1980s, Larry Wilkerson wanted employees under his oversight to excel, but he had a peculiar problem.

WilsonArt, a manufacturing company headquartered in Temple, employed workers 24 hours a day to maintain worldwide demands for its products. "We had employees straight out of high school. They were concerned about their future, but they couldn't get an education because they were working full time," Mr. Wilkerson said. "So, I came up with an idea on how we could get them educated while still maintaining their full-time jobs."

Taking breaks from their work shift to drive to the Temple Junior College campus for classes would be time-consuming. Class times often did not jibe with their schedules. Then, there was the problem of age differences. "Many of our employees didn't feel comfortable sitting in a classroom in the middle of the day with 18-year-old students," Mr. Wilkerson added.

He consulted with Dr. Charles L. Stout (1940-2014), dean of Continuing Education at Temple College. Dr. Stout set up two on-site classes at the WilsonArt plant. "We worked it so that employees in the early shift would go to a class after work. Then, the shift that worked the evening would come in an hour early to go to class. The group working the graveyard shift could come in at either time," Mr. Wilkerson said. "This was a way to get them sitting with their peers while getting management training."

Nancy Burroughs (1947-2005), business administration professor, agreed to travel to the plant to teach business management and leadership courses. A similar program was set up on the Scott & White Memorial Hospital and Clinic for its employees.

The plan was a win-win: The college gained more students, and employers gained well-trained employees. But the biggest winners were the employees. "Employees improved themselves so they could get promoted," Mr. Wilkerson said.

In 1988, when the college's board of trustees had an opening to fill an unexpired term, Mr. Wilkerson was encouraged to join as its first African American trustee. When that term ended, voters continued to reelect him to the board in subsequent terms. He even served a stint as board chair in 1995, during which time the board had to select a new president after the retirement of Dr. Marvin Felder. By the early 2020s, Mr. Wilkerson was well into his fourth decade as a trustee.

Mr. Wilkerson knew first-hand how transforming a college education could be. The Temple native came from a family of eight; his father often worked two jobs to support them all.

Larry Wilkerson (back row, at right) with other members of the board of trustees in 2017. (Steve Lemmons/Temple College)

"Back in 1969, when I graduated from Temple High, I had no choice," he said. "The Temple Independent School District had just come out of segregation. I moved over from Dunbar (the all-Black high school) to Temple High in my senior year. All my classmates and I were so busy trying to make up for the credits we were lacking from Dunbar in order to graduate with our class."

He credits Temple Junior College with giving him the foundation and support he needed at a critical time in his life. Mr. Wilkerson earned an associate degree at the college and then went on to receive a bachelor of business administration degree from the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor in Belton. He even met his wife, Ella Marie Cooper Wilkerson (1951-2007), at the college. After leaving WilsonArt, he opened a successful insurance agency.

Mr. Wilkerson viewed his service on the board of trustees as a way to "give back" to those who guided and inspired him to achieve higher goals.