

Sul Ross Bulletin (SRG) Bulletin Thirteen 21 October 2020

In Review and Sully Revisited

We have said most of the things we are going to say again here in previous Bulletins to our members. But it seems an appropriate time for a review since an important campus “representation” (Sully statue) will be addressed by the Commission on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion with findings and recommendations soon. If you are so inclined to voice your opinions, we hope and trust you will!

Stakeholders

When we ask ourselves “to whom does TAMU belong?” First of all, it is a State of Texas Public (and Flagship) University, so it belongs to Texas and Texans (and what they stand for). This is embodied in the democratic process of election of a Governor and Legislature. The Governor nominates Regents, confirmed by the Texas Senate. The Regents then select a Chancellor who hires a President. So, the Regents and Chancellor are owners and voters but definitely deciders. To some degree, TAMU belongs to the students, but significantly to their parents who send them, and also the scholarship donors (former students) who give to them graciously. They are voters. Importantly, TAMU belongs to the Former Students who understand it like no others can, love it, are proud of it, represent it, and support it with their gifts and service! They EARNED it to be voters for sure. Who it does NOT belong to are the state employees and faculty, most who are not Graduates of TAMU – who are public servants and are employed and compensated for “service” by the State to the “owners.” There ARE notable exceptions! They are “sayers” which is guaranteed in the US Constitution’s Bill of Rights. Everybody gets a “say.”

An SRG Board Input on the Qualifications and a Key Objective for the Next TAMU President

We now know that a search committee has been established for a new president, and it seems that this is the time that we should comment on the vital piece about which the foregoing quip is associated – the narrative of what and why we are importantly different. The new person selected needs to know and understand it as a qualification and condition of employment! In our opinion, the new President must not only have academic credentials, research knowledge, understand the importance of the athletics “front porch” concept, and have PROVEN LEADERSHIP experience, but it is also IMPERATIVE that he or she understands the “unexplainable” reasons which make TAMU great. The passion in which most SRG former students believe this cannot be overstated and is evidenced by their many expressions of concern over the past three months – and thus it needs to be set right this time around.

The new leader must be committed to it and be able to explain it, promote it (often), support it, defend it, culture it, respect it, live it, and insist that his or her staff and faculty (agree or not) also understand it, and at the least do not discredit it. A “void” has existed on this for the past five years here at Aggieland. It has caused issues which have been observed and exposed over the past three months. This should thus be at the fore, attention, priority and focus of the search committee so-as-to get this rectified by the new selectee.

Our Version of “It”

We, the Texas Aggies, have something “transcendent” that nobody else has, and yes, one cannot understand “it” if you are not a Texas Aggie - having gone through the experience so it can be imparted to you as a student. Outsiders observe it, ask for it, envy it, cannot understand it, and cannot create it; however, they still covet it and are jealous about it. Sul Ross’ vision initiated it (duty and honor), and great leaders have preserved and added to it (Gilchrist, Cushing, Rudder, Williams and others) as AMC and TAMU have trekked from the traditional to modernity. Now we must preserve “it!”

TAMU is a values-based University, with a rich history of selfless service and culture, along with accompanying traditions and Core Values that are imparted in the student experience to graduates. Those graduates then go forth with a sense of responsibility to answer calls of duty to State and Nation in all sectors, with “a spirit that can ne’r be told.” They work hard, are successful with their ethic, they are leaders of character, and because of their spirit and love for their beloved institution, they give back generously in every way possible! THAT is “it” into which students must understand they must integrate and assimilate. The choice is making the sum of the parts greater than the whole (our strength), or, being divided in the name of JUST diversity, with the sum equal to divided, individual parts! It IS “The Spirit of Aggieland!” Check out the Jon Hagler ’58, Corps Commander, 1957-58, letter to the parents of incoming fish: <https://www.txamfoundation.com/Fall-2016/Time-Capsule.aspx>

Surveys and “Data”

On 9 July, the students voiced their opinion via the Student Senate survey - and the results on the Sully statue’s future presence on Campus were released. The survey was very comprehensive and asked 6 basic questions with detailed analysis about the data collected. We shall not dive deep into all that since you can read it yourself at http://www.thebatt.com/news/texas-a-m-student-senate-releases-sully-survey-results/article_2a371f5e-c263-11ea-865d-cbfb4952794.html. However, the OVERALL results showed that 54% of the students who responded (22,824 students, or 39% of the 58,746 spring semester enrollees, undergraduate and graduate students) made their voices known that they were “likely or very likely to support no change to the statue.” If the Student Senate reps on the Commission have the well-publicized results of their survey as reference info, then what will The Association reps have? We believe this to be a cogent question, and more on that in a moment.

Now to the former students-donors since the 10th of June, The Association received many calls from their membership about a lot of topics, but the majority were about the Sully statue. The Association documented most of these calls and although not publicized per se, they were shared with the TAMU Administration. We do not know with whom the Administration shared them with, but it seems vital that this DATA also should be utilized by the Commission in their findings and recommendations since they are addressing the Statue. The Association is on record with the SRG Board of Directors that the vast majority were not in favor of moving the statue. If so, it would have fiscal consequences. So if the commission wants to know about those who may be “uncomfortable” about the Statue, then they should be vitally interested in a huge “voting” cohort of Texas Aggies who have clearly indicated they are “comfortable” with its continued long standing as a representation on TAMU’s campus per the intent of current state law.

Inclusion in a Welcoming Campus Environment

Remember when the tradition of “Howdy” was actually practiced? That greeting was and could still be a welcoming gesture for clearly fostering a welcoming and friendly campus atmosphere. Aggieland was famous for it. We should take it up again and be proactive with it!

The Texas Aggie traditions form a basis for inclusion in what has grown from a small Land Grant student body into the largest in America which is incredibly diverse. Now that is definitely a huge change! But what sets us apart is special and we should want to and can preserve it with purpose and leadership. And that is what makes inclusion so important. Diversity in itself is divisive. Unified as “We are the Aggies” via inclusion has and should remain the basis for our strength.

For that to be a reality, we should examine our orientation programs through which new fish join the Aggie family. After all, we have in place a huge investment and staff to implement and sustain that for them, and thus prepare them while here during the student experience so they can find their place and “It”. Inclusion in a welcoming campus atmosphere is dependent on attending these programs, understand who we are, give it a chance, and find one’s place in it.

There are over 1100 student groups at Aggieland - all with advisors under the auspices of the VP of Student Affairs (VPSA). Texas Aggie former student graduates are proof positive of the imparted spirit while students by their serving and giving back. So how can anyone not feel “welcomed,” included, and a part of something great if they give it a chance as a student? If one is “uncomfortable” because they did not attend the orientation programs and give themselves a chance to join in the Aggie student experience – after undergoing a very competitive process to be selected as one among many – then a transfer to another institution is definitely their next course of action. If they did participate, then something is wrong with our familiarization and orientation programs, and we need to fix them. That is NOT taking a required diversity course like

specified in the President's Ten Steps. Or sneaking in, unaccountably, a question on the State application form for TAMU.

Thousands of high school graduate applicants are not selected nor granted admittance to attend this Texas flagship University because of the competitive entrance process dictated by a finite capacity limit. Knowing that, we clearly assume that the applicants selected desire to be a Texas Aggie because of the reputation that Aggie graduates have for a great opportunity to lead a purposeful, successful and prosperous life – and treasure the “spirit” of loving their alma mater and giving back, to make it even greater as former students.

The SRG Sully Statue 11 June Letter to Regents, Chancellor and TAMU President

This is the letter where the SRG took a stand on the Sully Statue:

*Michael K. Young
President
Texas A&M University*

11 June 2020

Dear President Young,

The Board of the Sul Ross Group serves as the elected volunteer class agents of Aggies who have been graduated for more than 55 years. Since 1947 we have worked closely with The Association of Former Students to plan communications to and activities for our cohort of Texas Aggies. Our group is named in honor of Lawrence Sullivan Ross in recognition of his many contributions to Texas A&M. The naming of our group was not taken lightly then and is not today. We operate under guidance (a constitution) which gives us direction to: 1. Foster comradeship amongst our cluster of Texas Aggies which we do primarily in an annual reunion, 2. Keep our member constituents informed about matters concerning our beloved university which Ross saved and shaped starting in 1890, and 3. To serve our transcendent and value-based University as elder statesmen, and perpetuate the legacy of our namesake as “Keepers of the Aggie Spirit.”

We believe, as Americans, that every citizen has the precious and guaranteed right and freedom to have an opinion and express it in a peaceful way. Many of us have defended that right, many giving their lives, throughout our history - a rich history of service to the Nation. Texas Aggies have incredibly served in every sector to not only preserve and protect our rights but to also promulgate solutions to problems. We graduate leaders of character who serve before self and answer the calls to duty. We will place our record in that regard with anyone. The person who founded this culture and tradition was Ross. And we can proudly provide examples and evidence to this claim. We believe we are the anthesis of radical, illegal activities and expressions - to achieve ends otherwise.

On 20 November 2018, Chancellor John Sharp, after the Traditional Elephant Walk episode, wrote the following Letter to the Editor of the Battalion saying:

“A recent letter attacking Lawrence Sullivan Ross in The Battalion claiming he “has ties to white supremacy and committed many gratuitous acts of violence against people of color” is totally wrong and, in fact, the reverse is true!

Not only is it true that Ross saved Texas A&M when wealthy real estate developers in Austin were trying to shut it down, but he also saved Prairie View A&M as well. In a speech in Waco in July 1897, Edward Blackshear, for whom the Prairie View football stadium is named and who was the first leader of Prairie View A&M, praised Ross as perhaps the best friend black Texans ever had. Literally, Prairie View A&M and Texas A&M would not exist but for Lawrence Sullivan Ross.

Perhaps the writer of this letter also didn't know that black children who were deaf and blind had no services available to them until Ross, as Governor, ordered the creation of an institute specifically for blind and deaf black children in Texas and created a mental health facility for black Texans because they were excluded from that as well.

In addition, he had NO ties to white supremacy as the writer wrongly asserts. We are all entitled to our opinion, but we are not entitled to our own wrongheaded facts.

Lawrence Sullivan Ross will have his statue at Texas A&M forever, not because of obstinance, but because he deserves the honor with a lifetime of service to ALL TEXANS and ALL AGGIES."

Sincerely, John Sharp Chancellor

We stand with the Chancellor's statement! We would add that yes, Ross marched off to war as a 21-year-old private enlistee who was against secession. But because he was a young Texas hero already, he was elected the company commander and rose through the ranks to be a BG. He was later duly pardoned by the President of the United States. Arguably he was the most beloved and effective two term Governor Texas ever had post reconstruction. We submit that this week's defacing of his statue is a criminal act and a disgrace.

We the Sul Ross Board of Directors believe that truthful facts are the basis to make judgements, which, in Ross' case, we have done. Claims otherwise, as the Chancellor states, are wrong minded. We also believe that all Americans are entitled to subsequent opinions as-long-as the facts and truth are the basis. Political agenda cannot be the sole basis on which to make judgements about him, the man or his statue, as it graces our beloved University. And, historical context should not be ignored either in the judgement.

We stand with the Chancellor and our namesake, Ross, and believe that in the whole court of opinion, armed with all the facts, that the judgement will agree with ours today as it has for the past 130 years.

Sincerely,



*Tom Reid '61
President, Sul Ross Group*

CC: Elaine Mendoza, Chairmen of the Board of Regents, TAMU System; John Sharp, Chancellor, TAMU System; Porter Garner, President and CEO, The Association of Former Students

Sul Ross Group Members

The 14 June Sully Eagle Editorial

By JOHN A, ADAMS Jr. - Special to The Eagle (Letter to the Editor)

14 June 2020

“For the past few days, I have noted the stories and conversation flying around about Sul Ross. True to form, there is a tremendous amount of misinformation and hype about Texas A&M President Ross. His life and career is one of the most researched and chronicled of Texans prior to 1900.

I have spent more than 40 years reviewing dozens of newspapers, archival documents and publications on his life. Ross was an honorable man. However, there were opinions about him when he was alive and there have been barrels of ink used since 1900 to tell his story — some of which, to no one’s surprise — have been politically motivated and revisionist in nature. Ross was a household name by the time he was 19. Working on the Brazos Reservation near Graham with his father Shapley Ross, he was enlisted in the rangers to help stem the tide of hostile Indians and disruptive white trouble makers, who attacked both new settlers in the region as well as friendly Indians on the reservation. There were those who encroached on Indian lands and efforts were made to stop them. The late 1850s was a very unsettled and violent period on the western frontier of Texas.

Ross did indeed serve in the Confederate army, as did thousands of Texans including the entire 1883 inaugural faculty at The University of Texas. He returned home to Waco and received a full presidential pardon. He was one of the most vocal supporters of local education for all. He worked with a number of African American and Indian families as the region struggled to recover. Known for his impartial fairness he was recruited to run for sheriff and arrested a growing gang of white-criminal squatters who preyed on people in the badlands west of Waco. He abhorred mob violence and was swift to advocate harsh punishment for violators. To emphasis law and order he was the founder and catalyst in 1874 for the Sheriff’s Association of Texas, which still functions today.

His only other known memberships was as a Mason (the College Station lodge is named in his honor) and a supporter of a veterans group that raised funding and assistance for the widowed and orphaned families.

As a state senator, he championed education, frontier improvements and agricultural affairs. In 1886 he was elected governor by one of the largest percentage vote totals of any governor in Texas. A fiscal conservative, he balanced the state budget yet insisted that education at all levels be funded. Texas A&M and Prairie View Normal College would not be here today if it was not for Sul Ross. When opponents in Austin attacked, he went directly to the Legislature to prevent it from cutting off funding to both schools.

Ross continued to lead the efforts to expand African-American rural schools when radical Democrats wanted to de-fund support of local black education and he halted numerous attempts to attack the funding for Prairie View, fighting and demanding the Legislature to do the right thing.

He won — and provided additional funding and jobs after establishing one of the first agricultural experiment stations at an African American college in the United States. When African American Sen. William Holland proposed the hospital for the “Deaf, Dumb and Blind Colored Institute” (today MHMR), Ross supported the full funding. Against massive

opposition from the radical white Democrats, he appointed Holland, a Union Army war veteran, as its first director. When asked why, Ross simply noted, "He was the best man for the job." Concerned with the Texas criminal process, he insisted on a review and upon receiving the report he realized the inequity of justice and pardoned more African Americans than all the previous governors combined.

In 1890, at a time when he could have pursued other elected office or returned to his farm near Waco, he was offered the presidency of the A&M College of Texas. The school was struggling to jell into an institution, having faced low budgets, faculty turnover, poor water, and limited housing for students. There were no traditions as we know them today and a bleak undeveloped campus. Known statewide and very popular, it was said after Ross arrived, parents sent their sons not to A&M but "to Sul Ross."

And it was not only sons who attended A&M, Ross routinely enrolled from seven to nine girls each year, known as "special students" (some wore cadet uniforms), and the credits they earned were transferable to other colleges. Prior to his death in early 1898, Ross proposed a school for girls to be co-located with A&M, the plan was supported by the Former Students (Cadets) Association and the local Bryan merchants who quickly were excited by the potential benefits to the local economy.

Ross increased the age to enroll at A&M, required entrance exams and instilled an atmosphere and esprit de corps that rightly gives him claim as the founder of A&M traditions — with the advent in the 1890s of football, the Aggie Band, the Aggie ring, the Battalion newspaper, corps trips, march to the Brazos, and much more that sealed the identity and image of what was to be known a few years later as the Fightin' Texas Aggies and Aggieland.

One of his greatest accomplishments was the support of Prairie View A&M. While opponents in Austin yearly worked to kill funding, Ross made sure the only public school of high education for African Americans would grow and prosper. Ross hired a close personal friend, Professor Edward L. Blackshear, the former director of African-American schools in Austin when he was governor in the late 1880s, to become the 'principal' (president) of Prairie View. Blackshear, the most prominent black educator and leader in Texas, testified to the "nobility of his character and his genuine support of education for colored youths."

In addition to Ross and his staff spending a great deal of time at Prairie View, including holding periodic board meetings in Hempstead, Ross hosted Blackshear, his staff and students both at his residence on the A&M campus but also at his home in Waco. To encourage the growth of black education, he arranged special reduced train rates for the Black Baptist State Association to hold its annual meetings in Bryan, giving a chance for him and Blackshear to urge the clergy to promote education back home in their congregations.

Ross instilled a source of excellence and pride in higher education and espoused transcendent values of equality and justice for all in Texas. It is for this reason that to honor Ross and his legacy of selfless service as governor and his years of dedication to education for all Texans, the state of Texas and the Legislature, not some outside organization, approved funding for an official State of Texas statue in 1919, conspicuous in civilian dress, to honor President Sul Ross.

And thus, it is the totality of the man's life for which the statue stands."

John A. Adams Jr. '73, is a historian and author of We Are the Aggies, Softly Call the Muster and Keepers of the Spirit. Another book, Sul Ross at Texas A&M, is set for release in 2020

In Summary

Change inevitably marches constantly on! A fact. We elder Texas Aggies know that better than anyone. And although elderly, we may just possess some wisdom to share in the processes since 10 June. LSR undeniably set us on our transcendent path that is great – preserved by some great leaders since.

With change from AMC-to-TAMU, our beloved University, has become the largest student body in America and one that is richly diverse. We in the SRG embrace that. We also understand that historical context matters and that there are always “three sides to every story” and conclusion. TAMU is great because of the attributes we have described again here - formed out of our rich history of selfless service, culture, and value system. With change, therefore, we must preserve that which sets us apart. We believe that we, the SRG, have earned a voice in the matters proceeding – and an important “vote!”

You can reach us at SRG president@aggienetwork.com

Reminder: Anyone (Ags and non Ags, SRG Ags and all other Ags too) can “opt in” by going to <https://www.aggienetwork.com/theassociation/sulrossgroup.aspx> and simply putting in your name and email address, and then clicking on “submit.” You will then automatically receive all the SRG Bulletins.