



The Rio Grande Campus – 50 Years of History

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From 1925 to 1975, Austin High School was located at 1212 Rio Grande Avenue. Today that location is the Rio Grande Campus of the Austin Community College. The building had actually been built in 1915 as the John Allan Junior High School. Mr. Allen had made a major contribution to Austin schools in the 1890s, and the new building was constructed to provide additional opportunities for girls and boys. Special programs in “manual training” and “domestic arts” were offered at the Rio Grande site in the early years.

Then, in 1924, everyone understood that the local “high school” had run out of space at its location at 9th and Trinity Streets. This location is now the site of the First Baptist Church. But in 1900, it had become the “Austin High School” and was called “the finest high school in the South.” It filled the entire block between 9th and 10th, Trinity and Neches Streets. And that, in the last years, was too small a space for a high school with a thousand students.

So, during the Thanksgiving Holidays in 1925, the high school students and junior high students packed their books and lunchboxes and headed home. When they went back to school on the next Monday, the high school students went to 12th and Rio Grande, and the Junior High kids went to “Old Red”, the former Austin High at 9th and Trinity. They “traded campuses”. Educational leaders in town thought that there was “more room to expand” at the 12th and Rio Grande site. And then they expanded the Rio Grande site in 1924-25 to provide additional classrooms.

And so it became Austin High for fifty years. In 1929 they built a “real gym” across West Avenue (behind the school), and in 1939 they built the “Annex” of 24 additional classrooms on the north side of the original building. A new Band Hall was also constructed in 1939 and a “tunnel” was built under West Avenue. The “tunnel” was provided so students could safely cross “busy West Avenue” to reach the Band Hall and Gym. And of course, the House Park athletic fields were “just down the hill” from the campus.

As the city grew, school population reached 3000 at Austin High by 1951 and the Board of Education decided to build two additional schools – north and south. A. N. McCallum High School was built just south of Koenig Lane on the north edge of the city, and William B. Travis High School was built on the south side of town on East Oltorf Street. The city was split into THREE high school districts, and Austin High’s population dropped to about 1200 in 1953-54. African American students continued to attend a newly build Anderson High School on the east side of the city.

As time passed, parking problems became obvious at the Rio Grande campus. There wasn’t enough street parking around the school and that problem never got better. The building got older. Some major renovations, including air conditioning, were added in 1967.

Those who went to school at 12th and Rio Grande thought of their school as “Austin High” of course. But because there were three other high schools in Austin – McCallum, Travis, and Anderson High for African Americans, the Board of Education renamed our school “Stephen F. Austin High School”, honoring the man for whom the city was named.

By 1970 it was obvious that something had to be done. The building was 45 years old. Parking was a mess. We needed new science labs. The cafeteria was cramped. It was time to replace the building or move.

And the Board of Education decided to move.

But the move needed to be near the city center, so the school could serve as “the belt buckle of the city’s desegregation efforts”. Out of four choices, the site at 1715 West First Street was chosen. And, after a lawsuit about whether A. J. Zilker’s donation of parkland could be used for a school, construction began in 1973 and the first day of school at the Lakeside Campus was August 25, 1975.

Loyal Forever