

Raymond and Tirza

Martin High School

Historical Marker Narrative

By

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Context:

The first Texas school is believed to have been founded in Laredo. On March 22, 1783, Don Santiago de Jesús Sánchez, the Lieutenant Chief Justice of Laredo, acting with his assisting witnesses, Joseph Francisco de la Garza and José Alejandro Vidaurri, issued the order for the opening of a school. The Governor of the province directed that within eight days of his Royal decree all citizens having children of school age should place them in school to learn to read. Laredo remained loyal to the Spanish crown until Don Miguel Hidalgo Y Costilla raised the revolt against the mother country and in 1821 the independent Republic of Mexico took her place among the nations. Peace having been restored, one of the first acts of the City Council of Laredo was to look after the education of the youth.¹

In 1821, a school system was set up for the education of all the children of Laredo not just the wealthy. The system was short lived with the Texas Revolution of 1836. In 1848, Mexico's efforts to maintain schools in Laredo ended with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Public schools would now be under local and state governance. The Common School Law was passed in 1854 and Laredo shared in some of the school funds. In 1854 a census was taken and 467 students were identified. At this time James Girandon was appointed by the city council to take over the management of the schools. The continued education of Laredo's children was again interrupted by the Civil War. Reconstruction became the priority after the Civil War and little money was left for salaries.²

¹Seb S. Wilcox, "This city long center of education," *The Laredo Times*, April 25, 1937.

²Jack Davis, Laredo Independent School Records.

In 1866, S.R. Stevens was given a four-year contract to direct the Laredo Free Schools with a school committee appointed by the City Council. The function of the committee was to oversee pupil's progress and their individual work. The committee members were José. M. Rodríguez, Raymond Martin and John Z. Leyendecker.³

After an election in 1882, the City of Laredo assumed control of public free schools within its bounaries. Initially, the mayor would appoint three aldermen, whose committee was known as the Executive School Board. In 1883, the city council created the office of City Superintendent of schools and elected Captain E.R. Tarver, an ex-confederate officer, to be the superintendent and made him the executive officer of the board.⁴

This arrangement continued until May 2, 1899. At this time it was decided that a board of trustees composed of seven members would be elected by the people. This board of trustees would assume the management and control of the schools. This board elected Mr. B. F. Pettus as superintendent until 1901. In September 1901 Mr. L.J. Christen assumed the duties of superintendent until his death in 1929.⁵

Overview:

William Patrick Galligan succeeded Mr. Christen. Before World War I, Mr. Galligan was a practicing attorney. After the war, he decided to become a teacher and eventually joined the Laredo Independent School District in 1928 as assistant superintendent. A major achievement of Galligan was construction of Martin High School during the difficult economic era of the depression.⁶

³Ibid.

⁴W. P. Galligan, "Superintendent Galligan gives comprehensive story of development of local system," *The Laredo Times*, September 23, 1934.

⁵Ibid.

⁶"Education, 100 years of service," *The Laredo Times*, August 15, 1992, Centennial Edition, p. 17d.

As a result of the depression, the passage of the National Recovery Act enabled Laredo Independent School District to apply through the Public Works Administration for a loan and grant in the amount of \$325,000. In order to secure this loan, a bond issue was voted by the people on December 16, 1933. On August 25, 1934, the Public Works Administration made an allocation of a loan and grant in the amount of \$304,000.⁷

A Laredo pioneer whose name is mentioned with frequency is Samuel Mathias Jarvis. Jarvis played a vital role in assuring Laredo would develop first-class educational facilities through his generosity and foresight. The land on which Martin High School would eventually be built was donated by Jarvis to the city of Laredo in the 1800's. In today's standards it would be worth millions. The land was at a great distance north of the downtown area at that time. Jarvis, a native of New York and a graduate of Columbia University, had the foresight to envision the city's growth.⁸ The new high school built in the 1930's was not named after Jarvis, but after Raymond Martin.

Raymond Martin was a French immigrant who came to Laredo in 1857 and rose to become the wealthiest man in Webb County. Martin's political power grew with his marriage in 1870 to Tirza García, daughter of Bartolo García, one of Laredo's economic and political leaders.⁹ Raymond and Tirza's son, Albert Martin, was the mayor of Laredo during the construction of the new Raymond and Tirza Martin High School.

Plans to begin classes during the second semester of the 1936-1937 school year at the new high school were delayed. In January 1937, construction on the new high school building had been almost completed by contractor M.M. Ryland, but delays by subcontractors and the late

⁷W. P. Galligan, "Superintendent comprehensive story," *The Laredo Times*, September 23, 1934.

⁸Jim Parish, "Remembering Samuel M. Jarvis," *The Laredo Times*, September 22, 1986.

⁹Jerry D. Thompson, *Warm Weather and Bad Whiskey* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1991), p. 16.

arrival of furnishings and laboratory equipment prevented the timely opening.¹⁰ The much anticipated opening of the new high school was finally realized on March 8, 1937.

In 1937, Martin High School published a year book, *La Pitahaya*. The editor was Jo Cook and the managers Harold Hauseman and Raymond Leal with Mrs. Elizabeth Sorrell as the sponsor.¹¹ The year book included two pages giving credit to the superintendent, William P. Galligan, and board members J.C. Martin (president), Leon Daiches, C.L. Milton, Aaron Moser, M.S. Ryan, B.G. Salinas, Antonio Valls and business manager Hugh S. Cluck.

The 1937 *Pitahaya* yearbook credited the board in an essay entitled “Their Dream-- Accomplished Fact,” and gave background on its dream and described the new high school:

The new Raymond and Tirza Martin High School, into which the students and faculty moved on March 8, 1937, is the fulfillment of the dream of the esteemed members of our school board and our beloved superintendent, Mr. W. P. Galligan. For many years Laredo had needed a new school plant and it was through the efforts of these men that a loan and grant was obtained from the Federal government and work was finally begun in August, 1935.

The result is the handsome building, located on San Bernardo Avenue and Park Street, which bears the name of two pioneer citizens of Laredo who did much for education in those early days, and who were also the parents of Mr. Joe C. Martin, president of the school board and sheriff of Webb County, and of Mr. Albert Martin, mayor of the City of Laredo.¹²

¹⁰M. M. Ryland, “Building is booming in Laredo,” *The Laredo Times*, Jan 24, 1937, p. 9.

¹¹*La Pitahaya 1937*, pp. 14, 150.

¹²*Ibid.*

A. A. Leyendecker of Trout & Leyendecker Architects provided a thorough description of the building that was published in the *The Laredo Times* of November 23, 1937. It is of such thorough and excellent quality that it is worthwhile quoting in its entirety:

. . . “Raymond and Tirza Martin High School,” [is] Laredo’s new \$353,000 school building, which was completed last March and is one of the most modern and best equipped schools in Texas. The construction was made possible by the \$200,000 bond issue and a grant of \$153,600 by the Public Works Administration.¹³

The building has 390 feet frontage and is set back 250 feet from San Bernardo Avenue and 150 feet from Park Street, and is L-shaped in plan. It has both south and east main exposures and the main entrance faces diagonally the intersection of the two thoroughfares. Secondary entrances are provided from both San Bernardo Avenue and Park Street with rear entrances axially placed.

The building is of fire safe construction with the reinforced concrete and steel foundation, frame and floor and roof framing. Exterior walls are of Laredo Face Brick, the facing being orange buff in color and the trimming and ornamentation is of cast stone. The exterior design is executed simply in the modernistic manner, carrying the dignity appropriate to an educational edifice, without undue expenditure in ornamentation.

Corridor and entry floors are of terrazzo, recitation room floors are wood finish, and those of the administrative suite, the library and foods laboratories are of linoleum; the finish of the gymnasium is maple.

Interior partitions are of metal lath and plaster, tile gypsum block and brick, with plaster finish. The toilet and dressing rooms and shower rooms have sanitary tile finish.

A unique feature is the installation of a radio return-speech public address system, throughout the building, controlled from the principal’s office, which gives

¹³The *Pitahaya* gives \$250,000 from the sale of bonds and \$103,000 from the P.W.A. grant.

communication with any particular room, or with all parts of the building. Sound quieting treatment is installed in the structure to facilitate proper reception.

Appropriate and adequate equipment and the best of furnishings have been provided for all departments and facilities incorporated in the structure. Clothing and school supply storage for the pupils are provided through the placement of metal lockers built in the corridor walls, so installed that each student will be given possession of a locker for his individual use.

The Physical Education Unit . . . has a treble function, serving as an instructional unit, a public basketball arena and an auditorium. As an education unit, it accommodates simultaneously two classes of sixty pupils each; locker, dressing and shower facilities for the pupil capacity of the school are provided under the viewing balconies, and in addition there are provided the instructor's offices, team room and apparatus storage rooms. As a basketball arena, the unit provides a playing floor 70 feet by 104 feet and the concrete balconies seat 1000 spectators. As an auditorium, a stage 32 feet by 83 feet is provided at the rear (which may [be] closed off by folding doors and used for corrective physical educational purpose); public entrance is had through a spacious lobby and vestibule, from which rest rooms for the public are provided; the playing floor seats 1200 in addition to the balcony capacity, giving some 220 capacity for use as a public auditorium. The stage is equipped with a drapery curtain and cyclorama, and the gymnasium with appropriate basketball backstops, mats and other appurtenances.

The building proper contains twenty-nine recitation rooms and four study halls, interspersed among the various departments, giving a student capacity of 1600. On the first floor, at the right of the main entrance is located the community and dramatics room, with its small stage; to the left is the administrative suite, consisting of a waiting room, conference room, principal's office and registrar's room with vault and storage room adjacent. At the end of the entrance is the main stairway leading to the second floor. In the west wing, first floor, is located the second floor. In the west wing, first floor, is

located the commercial department, consisting of an office-practice room, a bookkeeping room and major and minor typewriting rooms; adjacent to this are recitation rooms available for classes in shorthand, the whole department being segregated so as to facilitate its use for night class instruction. In this wing, on the first floor are also included the girls' and women teachers' rest rooms.

At the center of the building there is provided a lunch room seating two hundred with adjacent kitchen.

The remainder of the first floor is given over to recitation rooms, except for the placing of the boys' main toilet and men teachers' rest room in the north wing.

At the center of the intersection of the L's on the second floor is the library, equipped to seat one hundred students. The librarian's desk is in the north-west corner, backed by a stack room, and around the walls are placed open, built-in book-shelving. The room is thirty feet by sixty feet, and has a ceiling height of fifteen feet. At its right is the library study hall, and to its left are the librarian's work and store room, and a library conference room.

In the west wing of the second floor, the Home Making Department is located. It is composed of a clothing laboratory and a foods laboratory, each for 24 students, and a Home Making suite consisting of a fixing-dining room 14 feet by 24 feet, a bedroom 12 feet by 14 feet, a bath, a storage pantry and ample closet space. In the north wing, second floor, the Science Department is placed, composed of a Physics and Chemistry Laboratory, a General Science Laboratory, and a Biology Laboratory, each fully equipped to accommodate 30 students, and supplemental dark room office and work room. In the separate wings are placed the secondary boys' and girls' toilets. The remainder of the second floor is given over to the recitation rooms.¹⁴

¹⁴A. A. Leyendecker, "Here's Laredo high school, one of State's finest built at a cost of \$353,000 recently," *The Laredo Times*, November 23, 1937. Thanks to Mr. Odie Arámbula for calling our attention to this article—Editor.

The 1937 *Pitahaya* provided additional information about the flagpole. It was located directly in front of the outer entrance.

The pole is about sixty-two feet high, made of hollow steel tubing, with a concrete base. The walks about the building are to be of concrete and are so arranged that every part of the school may be reached by a nice walk.

. . . Mr. M. L. Ryland of Uvalde is the contractor. His representative is Mr. J.S. Worcester, active superintendent The government engineer for public work is Mr. Johnson.

In September of 1937, the principal of the new high school announced the registration of classes and beginning of the school year 1937-1938, which was to be the first full year at the new high school. Principal Mr. W. J. Lemoine reported that Monday, September 6th through Wednesday, the 8th, registration would take place beginning with the seniors and classes were to begin Thursday, September 9th at 8:30 in the morning.¹⁵

A total of 949 freshman, sophomores, juniors and seniors were enrolled at the only public high school in the Laredo Independent School District by the start of classes on September 9th with enrollment soon expected to reach 1,100 or more. The large and spacious cafeteria, with Mr. Porter Yates as manager, was opened to provide lunches for the teachers and students at ten, fifteen, and twenty cents each.¹⁶

Almost sixty-three years later, the millennium total enrollment at Martin High School as of February 7, is 1,886 with two more additional high schools for a total enrollment of 5,117 in the high schools of Laredo Independent School District.¹⁷

¹⁵“School schedules,” *The Laredo Times*, September 5, 1937.

¹⁶“949 enroll at high school,” *The Laredo Times*, September 9, 1937, p. 5.

¹⁷Ms. Verónica Castellón, Laredo Independent School’s Public Information Officer, Interview with Lorraine Laurel, February 7, 2000.

Historical/Cultural Significance

Martin High School was the only public secondary institution until 1964 when Nixon High School opened its doors. It prepared thousands of students, many of whom went on to excel in their careers. In the early 1990s a Martin Hi graduate, Guadalupe (Pitín) Guajardo ('56), realized that many Martin graduates from the different *barrios* (neighborhoods) had gone on to colleges and universities and had become successful professionals and leaders at the local, state, and national levels. Initially using his own funds, and with the assistance of Peter Lizcano ('58), Pitín began to honor the most outstanding of the graduates in 1995 by inducting them as "Tiger Legends." So far 128 have been inducted and others will soon follow. Inductees go back to the elementary school they attended to address the students and to encourage them to surmount the obstacles they encountered.¹⁸

The range of professions the graduates achieved is quite impressive. Laredo's most well known and greatly appreciated medical doctor is Joaquín G. Cigarroa ('41). He and his brothers, sons, nephews and nieces not only provide crucial medical services but they have all been involved in educational boards from the local school districts to the Texas Coordinating Board. Two 1979 graduates became physicians: Laura Torres who went to Rice and then Harvard Medical School, and Angélica Flores who graduated from UT Austin and then Baylor Medical School. Aurora González ('88) went to Yale and later to Southwestern Medical School and then established her practice in Houston. Pedro Castañeda ('61) and Alfredo Treviño ('61), like so many other local doctors, provide pediatric and ophthalmology services respectively for many patients who could not otherwise afford medical attention. Sylvia P. Fernández ('56) obtained a

¹⁸Guadalupe (Pitín) Guajardo interview, December 6, 2006. Many thanks to Odie Arámbula for providing the list of Tiger Legends prepared by Pitín.

bachelor's from Alabama University and subsequently a Ph.D. from Texas A&M and now teaches health education at the UT Health Science Center in San Antonio.

Engineering and architecture also attracted Martin Hi graduates. Raúl (Bully) Fernández ('55) and Rogelio Rivera ('54) served as civil engineers after attaining their degrees from Texas A&M. Fernández served on the A&M Board of Regents for several years. Arturo B. Campos ('52) earned a degree in electrical engineering from UT Austin. Thanks to him the lives of three astronauts were saved on the NASA Apollo 13 mission to the moon. In April 1970 Campos received an urgent phone call to report to duty immediately when the astronauts were forced to move to the moon-landing craft for safety after an oxygen tank exploded in the main craft. Fortunately he had prepared a study of how to recharge and conserve battery energy that permitted the astronauts to return safely to the earth.¹⁹ John Hernández ('46) earned his doctorate in civil engineering from Harvard University. Carlos Mejía ('59) has overseen many a public project in Laredo after obtaining his degree in civil engineering from Texas A&M. Salvador Mercado ('72) worked for the Texas Department of Transportation after obtaining his degree in engineering from UT Austin. Having received her degree from UT San Antonio, Elidia Banda ('84) served as a Civil Engineer for the City of San Antonio. John Hickey ('63) has drawn many an architectural plan for local schools and other buildings.

Aware of the need to provide Hispanic role models at the higher educational level, many graduates joined the ranks of faculty and/or administration. Norma Cantú ('65) taught at Texas A&M International University and currently teaches at UT San Antonio, encouraging students to become writers like her. Cecilia May Moreno ('62) became a top administrator after earning her

¹⁹See <http://www.ghg.net/woodfile/TRACT135.html> and ntrs.nasa.gov/archive/nasa/casi.ntrs.nasa.gov/19720025198_19722025198.pdf , both accessed December 6, 2006.

bachelor's from Texas Women's University and her Ph.D. from A&M Kingsville. Alfredo de los Santos ('53) became a model for many Hispanics by convincing them that they too could become Presidents of community colleges and universities. He was one of the founders of TACHE (Texas Association of Chicanos in Higher Education). Among members of this organization was Laura Rendón ('66) who taught at Laredo Junior College and then became a professor at California State Long Beach. Armando Ayala ('49) was and continues to be in the forefront of the Chicano movement in California. Although his friends called him "*El Hueso*," he put a lot of meat on the Mexican American skeleton thanks to his work at the University of California Sacramento in Multi-Cultural Studies. At the elementary to high school level two Tiger Legends have become superintendents. After serving as Texas State Representative Vidal M. Treviño ('47) served as Superintendent of Laredo Independent School District for many years. Roberto Santos ('62) managed to move up within the administrative structure of one of the fastest growing school districts (United Independent) to become its current Superintendent. One of the most beloved of principals at Martin Hi was Col. Roberto J. Flores ('49) who served from 1975 to 1994, establishing a record for longevity in that capacity.

Journalism is not an easy profession in which to succeed. Jesús Chavarría ('53), however, was able to shift from professor of Latin American history at UC Santa Barbara to establish the highly regarded *Hispanic Business* magazine. Odie Arámbula ('54) got the journalistic bug while working on the Martin Hi newspaper. After obtaining his degree in that field from UT Austin he joined the *Laredo Times* and worked his way up to editor of the *Laredo Morning Times*. Clara García Moreno ('53) and Jennie Lynn Leyendecker ('57) likewise entered the field. Photography attracted Teófilo Esquivel ('60), a descendant of one of Laredo's best known family in the field.

Esquivel followed his father's footsteps by becoming a professional photographer. After graduating from UT Austin, Sara Puig Laas ('47) became a television producer and author.

Many an entrepreneur was formed at Martin Hi. Paul Young Jr. ('59) is a top Hispanic automobile dealer ranking among the top eleven U.S. dealers. José M. Azios ('50) and José Sepúlveda ('59) established businesses in trucking and international trade. Graciela Esquivel González ('67) established a chain of day care centers. Among his business enterprises George E. Neel ('47) established an outstanding title company. Irving Greenblum ('45) and Isaac Epstein ('49), both graduates of UT Austin, invested in and developed several very successful businesses. Blanca Chapa ('48) established a flourishing travel agency. Héctor Chapa Jr. (79) became district manager for Wendy's International. Rubén M. García ('50) and his brothers joined in establishing a construction company which still remains in great demand, and he still managed to serve on the Laredo Junior College Board of Trustees for many years. Cruz Soto ('57) became a high level manager in charge of the mid-Atlantic division of a major corporation. José Luis Novoa ('57) established a flourishing business computer enterprise.

Many wealthy Mexican businessmen safeguard substantial amounts of their capital in U.S. banks, and Laredo has become one of their favorite cities in which to deposit their money. One of the most successful bankers will soon be inducted as a Tiger Legend: Antonio Sánchez Jr. ('61). He and his father founded the International Bank of Commerce in 1966 with less than \$1 million in assets. Now it counts with \$10.6 billion in assets, making it Texas' largest holding company. It now serves 90 communities in Texas and Oklahoma with more than 220 branches and more than 330 ATM's.²⁰ Tony Sánchez was very successful in the oil and gas industry and ran for governor of Texas as a Democrat a few years ago. Other Martin graduates have also

²⁰ <https://www.ibc.com/AboutIBC-Home.aspx> , accessed Dec 4, 2006.

succeeded in the banking industry. Sharyn Peterson Jordan ('62) serves at another large entity, the Laredo National Bank. Renato Ramírez ('57) is President of an IBOC subsidiary, the International Bank of Commerce in Zapata, Texas. Anselmo Castro ('78) is an executive with IBOC.

Politics has attracted many a Martin graduate. Businessman Alberto Santos ('44) served as Webb County Judge for many years. Raúl Vásquez ('72) serves as 111th District Court Judge, and Danny Valdez ('73) has been Justice of the Peace and will become Webb County Judge in January 2007. William (Billy) Hall Jr. ('59) was Laredo's Texas State Representative and later Webb County Treasurer. Héctor Liendo ('68) serves as Justice of the Peace for Precinct One and Oscar Omar Martínez ('59) as Justice of the Peace for Precinct Four. Gustavo García ('50) became the first Hispanic Mayor of Austin after fighting for civil rights and establishing an accounting firm. Judith G. Gutiérrez ('61) has served as Webb County Commissioner for many years. Col. Peter P. Flores ('77) serves as Director of Law Enforcement Division of Texas Parks and Wildlife.

The military is another attractive field of endeavor. Captain Heriberto A. García ('50) served in the U.S. Army Artillery and he was the first Laredoan killed in Viet-Nam (November 8, 1964). Sgt. First Class Guadalupe Martínez ('54) was with the U.S. Army Airborne and also gave his life for our country. Lt. Col. Andrés N. Cuéllar ('46) served in the U.S. Air Force. After serving in Vietnam, Juan Ibarra ('66) became an administrator at Laredo Junior College.

Many graduates became attorneys. A few names will suffice. Alberto Huerta ('61) practiced in Corpus Christi where he became an entrepreneur. Carlos Castellón ('46) managed to obtain his law degree from UT Austin and establish a flourishing law firm. Oscar Peña ('51) has successfully defended many clients and has done much *pro bono* work. Armando X. López ('76)

defends civil and other cases and managed to serve as a Laredo Independent School District Board member. Rosaura P. (Wawi) Tijerina ('76) served as Municipal Court Judge and was just elected Webb County Commissioner. Eduardo (Wayo) Peña ('53), a UT Austin graduate, was involved in many Hispanic civil rights cases during his career in Washington, D.C. Two graduates have served as judges in Houston: Arnulfo D. Azios ('39), as Senior State District Judge, and Abraham Ramírez ('47).

In music, The Quarternotes, all 1954 graduates--Juan Garza Góngora, Juan Orfila, René Herrera, René Ornelas--became nationally popular in the 1960s and 70s, appearing in television's Dick Clark's American Bandstand and Arthur Godfrey's Talent Search. Both René were composers; "Angelito" and "Lo Mucho que te quiero" are the best known. Another very popular group were the Valdez Brothers: Antonio ('56), Santiago Jimmy ('59), Ricardo ('60), Juan ('61), Carlos Felipe ('63), Michael Patrick ('66), and Estela Valdez López ('68). Several remained professional musicians, others became music educators, and others became businesspersons. In a related field, two of the Tiger Legends have established dance studios in which many Laredoans have been trained: Altagracia Azios García (/51) and Diana Rendón Gutiérrez ('83). A Laredoan drifted to California but still continues to influence Laredoans is Irineo Gutiérrez ('52). "Neo" was a dance and fine arts teacher at Beverley Hills High School and every Christmas he offers workshops in Laredo. In the field of art, Amado Peña ('61) has become internationally recognized with his unique American Indian paintings. Julia Vera ('59) is a Hollywood actress.

Several of the graduates became outstanding coaches. Alberto Ochoa ('37), John Valls ('43), John Silva ('55), Héctor Chacón ('56) and Enrique Mejía ('57), and Isidro García ('58) are

all recognized as coaches who carefully groomed the athletes and urged them to excel so that the habits they formed would help them in their future careers.

Laredo owes much to the teachers, coaches, and principals at Martin Hi. It was they who prepared their graduates to succeed in their professions and in life. The previous examples of graduates inducted as Tiger Legends are but a few of many who became leaders locally, statewide, and nationally. Such is the significance of Martin High School.

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