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Bakersfield College's "Move to the Hill" (Archives)

## The "Move to the Hill" Turns 50

This issue of the Archives Newsletter celebrates the 50th anniversary of BC's "move to the hill." Classes began that spring semester of 1956 on the Kern County Union High School campus of Bakersfield High School; then, over the single week of spring break, everything was moved to the new site on the bluffs over the

Kern. Miraculously, classes continued the following Monday without interruption.

BC didn't merely move its physical location; the move was also symbolic of the changes the college underwent in the following years – its transformation from a "junior college" to a "community college." The staff, faculty, administration, and – above all – the students at that time experienced the excitement (and the mud!) of that move first-hand. We'd like to share some of their memories with you.

– Carol Cunningham, Archives Newsletter Editor

## THE BIG MOVE

by Edward Simonsen

Bakersfield Junior College had, since its establishment in 1913, shared a campus with Bakersfield High school or, as it was known in the early years, KCUHS, commonly called KC. Actually, the junior college was more like a step child on the high school campus, having grown out of efforts to extend the high school offerings and meet some of the needs of the young people of the community for college-level courses. For years the College had dreamed of having its own campus, but depression and war had intervened, and it wasn't until 1955 that the cornerstone was laid for its new home up on the Panorama bluffs. Although the earthquakes of 1952 were destructive in the extreme, they were fortuitous for what was to be called Bakersfield College. A bond issue following the earthquakes easily passed for a handsome sum in those days of \$17 million, and the building of a new college was included in this bond. It was finally going to be time for "the big move".



Former Bakersfield College President, Edward Simonsen

(See THE BIG MOVE, page 2)



President Simonsen (Archives Collection)

## THE BIG MOVE: Simonsen

Grace Bird, who was dean of the junior college from 1921 until 1950, had visions of a college on a hill. In April, 1956, with Ralph Prator at the helm, Bakersfield College, as it was now called, was built on a hill, a wonderful 150 acres up on the Panorama bluffs where it has seen a very productive and expansive fifty years, serving tens of thousands of students, and touching the lives of families all over Kern County. In President Prator's greetings to the students in the 1956 yearbook, *The Raconteur*, he stated "The trip to the promised land took place this year. The waters of the big sea of speculation parted to let the red and white clad B.C.-ites onto the shore of a new era."

After many years of dreaming, and after four years of intensive planning and building, the big move took place over Easter vacation, 1956. There were those who thought it would be easier to wait until summer vacation to make the move, and asked rather pointedly, "What's the big rush?" But the students of the class of 1956 had a compelling argument that favored moving during the spring term. They had been looking forward to being the first class to receive their degrees from the campus on the hill, and they did not want to be denied this distinction. Their views carried the day and the move was made during spring break.

The junior college of 1955-56 was intertwined with the high school. The faculty were frequently shared, and the big question as the move became imminent was who on the teaching faculty would go with the college, and who would stay on at Bakersfield High School. There was a lot at stake in these decisions both at the individual and the institutional levels. There was triumph and disappointment as the decisions were made and announced. Bakersfield Junior College had developed a very strong cadre of faculty, some of whom also taught high school classes. And there were also very effective faculty teaching at the high school level who aspired to go with the college. So, these matters had to be settled, and ruffled feathers smoothed. As the 1955-56 academic year moved along, the decisions were made and the college moved on with its plans for complete separation from the high school. These were not easy decisions, and there were many agonizing moments, and some tears shed.

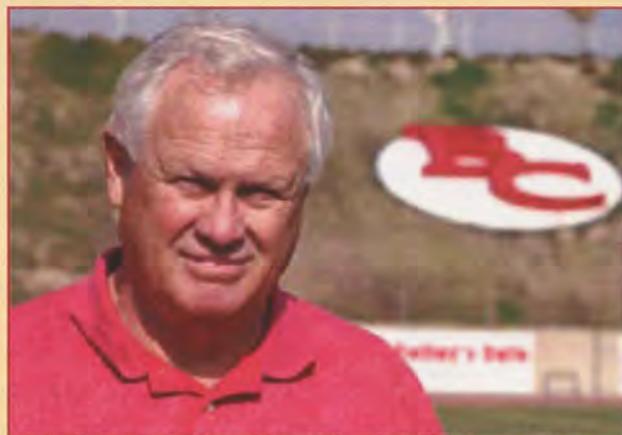
The faculty, and the entire staff, to some degree, were involved in the planning of the new campus; Ralph Prator saw to that. But Ralph delegated responsibility for actually moving everything and everybody to me, so I had the experience of coordinating the big move. The job was made easier by the fact that much of the new furniture, and all of the new equipment had already been ordered and delivered to the new campus. The move was accomplished with rented panel trucks, with everyone helping, including faculty, administrators, staff, and students. While there were a few hitches, the move went fairly smoothly, and to everyone's surprise classes were held starting Monday morning April 2, 1956 in Bakersfield College's new home on the hill.

In the 1956 *Raconteur*, the students wrote what we all felt at the time when they said, "Bakersfield College was entering a new and exciting period in its history, a period filled with opportunities to become the finest community college in the nation." In the intervening 50 years this statement has turned out to be prophetic, as the College has established itself state-wide and nationally as "one of the best." Those were exciting times in the history of Bakersfield College, and all of us who had a part in the big move have fond recollections of the events and the people connected to the College realizing Grace Bird's vision of a college on a hill.

# Bakersfield College: Fifty Years on “the Bluffs”

by Bob Covey

It was 1950 and the person who had led Bakersfield Junior College from 1915 until her resignation in 1950, Grace Bird, was leaving to take a position at UC Berkeley. Ralph Prator was appointed BC President as District Superintendent, Theron McCuen, started to spearhead a drive to find a place to move the junior college off the Bakersfield High School campus. Prator proved to be a good choice.



Bob Covey (Photo: Jacqueline White, Renegade Rip)

McCuen looked to a site on “the bluffs” north and east of the high school campus. The land was rough, heavily gullied and overlooking the oilfields and Kern River. It was a place youngsters hunted jackrabbits and bonfires were built for rallies the night before big football games. McCuen received approval from the Board to investigate the site, so on September 11, 1950, the architectural firm of Wright, Metcalf, and Parsons, AIA, was hired to make the necessary preliminary studies for the new campus.

On March 12, 1951, the Board authorized the purchase from Kern County Land Company of 151.68 acres at a cost of \$625 per acre. The total was \$94,850,00. The campus construction costs were estimated at \$17,000,000. The voters passed the necessary bond issue for construction later that year.

McCuen next contracted J.A. Thompson and Son Company to start grading the new campus site. C.R. James Company was hired to drill and install two 250,000-gallon water storage tanks. The architects started drawing plans for a fifteen building campus including a stadium. When completed, the architectural style for the buildings was called “a contemporary modern school design”.

Prator had considerable background in administration. He immediately started to research building issues and wrote many letters to McCuen from his findings. In one three-page letter to McCuen, dated December 4, 1951, Prator presented the many and varied considerations relative to the construction of just one structure, the stadium. It was thorough, intellectual, unbiased, and impressive.

By 1953, some major decisions were at hand. Prator had a trusted Vice-President in Dr. Edward Simonsen and appointed him as “Coordinator of the Building Program” for all structures except athletics. This was somewhat curious because Simonsen at that time was also the BC Athletic Director, but Prator knew the magnitude of the project and wanted Simonsen on the larger job. He appointed Bakersfield High School Athletic Director, J.B. “Cap” Haralson, to coordinate the construction of buildings and fields for physical education and athletics. The Renegades had often been selling out Griffith Field for their games, needed a much larger stadium, and Prator knew Haralson to be very capable.

In 1953, the Assistant to the Superintendent, Theron Taber, presented to Haralson an idea for a two-decked stadium similar to one he had seen at Rice University in Houston. Haralson liked the concept and advanced it to the architects. That same year, Haralson asked his respected friend, the BC basketball coach Gil Bishop, to work with him on the project. Both worked well together and made difficult decisions that provided exceptional athletic facilities for the college and community.

Reacting to some pressure to construct the stadium only for football, both Haralson and Bishop knew the most cost-effective plan was to build it for both football and track, with lights for night activities, and adequate seating and parking for major events.

In 1954, Prator knew the stadium would be completed for the 1955 football season and started to make plans for that event. The stadium construction had been started before the rest of the campus so the considerable dirt to be removed from the stadium floor could be used to level the grounds on the rest of campus. When completed it would have 16,546 seats and graded so an additional 13,500 seats could be added later, totaling 30,000. The stadium would have a sight line of three hundred feet from the top row of seats to the center of the football field, and two hundred thirty feet from the top row to the edge of the football field.

As the stadium neared completion, Haralson turned to the brick rubble from the Courthouse destroyed in the 1952 earthquake. The red bricks were crushed and became the main component of the running track surface and when completed was both beautiful but proved to be one of the best track competition surfaces in the world.

*(See 50 YEARS, page 4)*

## 50 YEARS: Covey

On September 23, head football coach Homer Beatty led his Renegades against Pasadena City College before 16,500 spectators, the largest crowd ever to watch a junior college game. BC won the game 36 to 0, but on that night in the beautiful new stadium a generation of Bakersfield College football support if not born then, was certainly greatly increased.

By mid-March, 1956, the campus was nearing completion. Prator decided to move the 1600 students to their new home on April 2, the first Monday after Easter Vacation. The college that had been on the high school campus since 1913 had a new home. The dedication ceremonies were held October 16.

The effects Memorial Stadium and the large football crowds had on the community were not lost on Haralson and Bishop. They invited officials from the Amateur Athletic Union to visit the stadium. Impressed, the 68<sup>th</sup>. Annual National A.A.U. Track & Field Championships were awarded to Bakersfield for June 22 and 23. It was the qualifying meet to select the 1956 Olympic Team for Melbourne.

The meet was a success on many levels. For the city, in one weekend the meet brought in over one million new dollars to the economy. For the college, it brought national attention to the new college campus, an advertisement that could not be defined in dollars. For the A.A.U., the meet became the first of many to return to the city. More national meets would be held in Bakersfield over the next twenty years than in any other city in the U.S.

Ralph Prator retired in 1958 and Edward Simonsen replaced him as college President. He was President for ten years then District Chancellor for another ten years. He retired in 1978.

On April 21, 2006, Bakersfield will celebrate fifty years on campus. On that day, Ed Simonsen will be on hand and a building will be renamed in his honor. The man who had been a music teacher at East High School, had worn many administrative hats including BC Dean of Men, Athletic Director, President, and District Chancellor, and had so well coordinated the new campus construction project, will find his name on the Speech, Arts, and Music Building. He often played his oboe in noon concerts with Dale and Rebecca Brooks at the indoor or outdoor theaters, so the selection of this building is most appropriate.

The building will be renamed the "Dr. Ed Simonsen Performing Arts Center." On campus, the building referred for years by the acronym "SAM" will most likely then be known as "Ed".



Bakersfield College groundbreaking ceremony, 1953.

*"Please, daddy, all I want is a crimson Corvette," pleads Mickie Witham. Don Spickler offers his own pleas as he reminds Santt that it's only six months till Dec. 25, and that a '56 Corvette, any color, would fit nicely in a stocking. Corvettes are sold by Three-Way Chevrolet at 22nd and Chester.*

*- Copy from the original 1956 Raconteur ad.*



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# MOVE TO THE HILL

by John J. Collins

For 43 years Bakersfield Junior College was located on the Bakersfield High School Campus, growing from a small adjunct of the high school to a college with a very favorable academic reputation. Back in those years junior colleges were considered junior to a four-year college or university, and Bakersfield had a very strong alliance with the University of California at Berkeley. Students attending Bakersfield Junior College tended to transfer to Cal, where their academic records turned out to be exemplary, giving the college a very fine statewide name for excellence.

When I joined the staff at Bakersfield Junior College in 1947 I believe there were about 1,000 students enrolled, many of them veterans of WWII. The curriculum was transfer oriented, the faculty was outstanding, the football team was good, and the students had a wonderful experience at this small two-year college. On the same campus Bakersfield High School enrolled about 4,000 students, so the campus was like a very active small town. My recollection is that the major problem on campus revolved around who could smoke. The high school kids were forbidden, and the older college students could light up and ruin their health.

We shared the facilities with the high school, including laboratories, many classrooms, Griffith Stadium, buses, and the cafeteria. The high school district board was also the junior college board, and there was one superintendent managing the entire enterprise. Grace Bird was the Director of the Junior College, and she had an enviable statewide reputation as an effective leader of the college. She had been on the staff since 1917 when the college was only four years old, and when she left in 1950 it was to be an administrator at U.C. Berkeley. Miss Bird, as we all called her, was succeeded by Ralph Prator in 1950, and he was given the title of president.

It was Ralph Prator who led the college in its important "Move to the Hill" in 1956. Dr. Prator was an energetic, effective leader, who involved the staff in the planning of the new campus up on the Panorama Bluffs. As a matter of fact, it was Prator who moved the college from "junior" to "community", changed its name to Bakersfield College, expanded the curriculum and the size of the faculty, and recruited an exemplary staff that moved Bakersfield College into the ranks of one of the top community colleges in the state. He was ably assisted by Ed Simonsen who actually was in charge of organizing and effecting the big move in April, 1956, fifty years ago. And, Ed stayed on to serve ten years as President of the College, and also as the first Chancellor of the Kern Community College District to serve another ten years.

So, we all packed up, left the old buildings of Bakersfield High School, and moved into our shiny new facilities up on the hill. The students, and also all of the rest of us, were thrilled with our new home, took pride in it, and felt like pioneers. Not all of the buildings were finished, the sidewalks were only half built, and the cafeteria was down in the gymnasium. Down on the old campus most of the faculty had very limited office space, but our new campus had, by comparison, wonderfully appointed offices, shared mainly with only one colleague. We had moved up in the world!

Back in 1956, and for 12 additional years, Bakersfield College was the only college in town. Initially in its present home, the college enrolled about 1,500 students, but with the new facilities, and a new, energetic push by the entire staff and student body, the college was soon serving 5,000 students, and later grew to 15,000. Those early student bodies of the late 50's were very active, creating a climate on campus that rivaled many four-year colleges with respect to stimulating out-of-class programs and events. The great new home for the college had provided a new burst of energy from the staff and students for academic achievement, and also for a full college experience beyond the classroom. Bakersfield College had, and has, a warm place in the hearts of the people of the community, many of whom attended the college or have sent their sons and daughters there. The "Move To The Hill" was a thrilling venture, and those who participated in it carry those memories with them to this day.

**Note:** At the time of the move I was teaching two sections of Sociology 1, had a part-time counseling assignment, and was the head Track Coach.



John J. Collins

# The Move

by Gerald Haslam



Gerald Haslam

In those days before air conditioners, folks often emerged from houses in early evenings to water lawns, exchange greetings, visit a bit--a communal ritual. I was a freshman at B.C. then and I especially remember one notably grouchy neighbor--presumably not a fan of Bakersfield College football--who said something like, "Well, that shows what their priorities are."

He was referring, of course, to the opening of the stadium before classes began on the new campus. My response was delight that we'd soon have classes at a locale we didn't share with a high school. I was unconcerned about the order in which facilities were opened. At last, I thought, it would feel like a real college. And it did.

Of course, after matriculating from the all-male, strictly assigned classes of Garces High School, I was already flush with freedom. When a sophomore told me I had to wear a dink, I told him to go fish. My bud's and I left campus whenever we pleased. I was much in love with a co-ed whom I visited at E.B.H.S., but attending classes at Bakersfield College with beauties from all over the county did nothing to improve my concentration. On the other hand, it certainly enriched my fantasy life.

When we made The Move...we actually thought of it with capital letters...our status as students somehow changed. We at last had a mature enclave of our own, even if I personally was distinctly immature. True, the campus was at first somewhat limited, with trails and planks rather than sidewalks, with some classrooms that seemed only semi-finished, and with a great expanse of horned-toad habitat...but it was ours. We were no longer jockeying with 14-year-olds at the water fountain.

My earliest distinct memory of the new setting is of traipsing through mud during the first real rain after the move; slipping and sliding, I found myself laughing with students whom I hadn't previously met. One attractive coed lost her ballerina slipper when her foot plunged into mud next to a plank sidewalk. Hoping to impress her, two of my buddies from Garces wrestled one another for the privilege of recovering the maiden's shoe and only succeeded in shoving it so deeply into the muck that it was never recovered. Along with their aspirations, that ballerina slipper remains buried there today, a monument to love unfulfilled.

On the hill I soon came to know a number of older students, military veterans mostly. I don't know why I hadn't encountered them on the old campus--probably because there hadn't been much of a gathering spot there. In any case, many of them became for me as for other younger pupils mentors as well as friends. I also got to know jocks I'd competed against while in high school. By the way, B.C. then, like Bakersfield itself, was socially segregated by race, but that was changing...we were changing it, associating with one another with a freedom unknown and not necessarily pleasing to our elders. As a result, those were interesting, challenging, rewarding days.

And stimulating: I found teachers like Jack Casey, Paul Gordon, Don Frantz and Dorothy Overly, as well as coaches such John Collins, Jack Frost and that unofficial mentor, "Val" Valembos, to be among the best I'd ever encountered; they still rank high with me. Sad to say, my own classroom performance was indifferent, but that

(See *THE MOVE*, page 7)

Buddy Ward, formerly a student at BC and now a salesman for George Habersfeld, 1510 Chester Ave., stresses the importance of the phrase, "It's a Foooord!" Jerry Gibbons and Mickie Witham agree that the quality and eye-appeal of the '56 Ford convertible eliminate need for high-pressured sales talks to sell this car.

-- from the original  
'56 Raconteur ad



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## THE MOVE: Haslam

wasn't the school's fault; I was 18 going on 13. In spite of that, I felt the world opening and far more seemed possible to me than it had while we were consigned to the downtown campus we shared with the Drillers. Our new setting was a place to grow... if you were ready.

Maybe it was the vista, still one of my favorites: the canyon opening to the east, the tan hills like supine lions dotted with wooden oil derricks and, below, the broad vein of the river's lush riparian forest. On clear days we could view vast stretches of agricultural fields to the west with hills in the background far beyond them, while the muscular Tehachapis-- sometimes dusted with snow--rose to the east. It could all be breathtaking.

Just as this was not the flat, monotonous Central Valley of stereotype, the student body was not a homogeneous population of rednecks wearing belt buckles big as their heads. It was the descendants of vaqueros and slaves, peasants and kings from all continents; it was America writ small. That realization surely shaped my resolve to write about a locale so misunderstood and maligned. No, this campus was not only a place to start from but a place to come back to, and I've always felt connected.

As for that stadium, I would be there several years later, just back from the army, when I learned that the Cal Poly football team's plane had crashed, killing three of my B.C. pals. That, not the gridiron, remains my inerasable memory of the structure that led the way on the hill.

## Memories of the Move

by Charlie Mae Littlejohn

The summer of 1954 was a very long time ago, but I remember sitting in a room in the JC Building at Bakersfield High School taking the BC Entrance exam. Near the end of the exam time, the proctor (Richard Tigner) asked to speak with me after the exam. It was there that I was offered a job as student secretary to him in the Business Education Department. I'm still not sure how he knew I needed a part-time job.

The school years 1954-55 and 1955-56 I spent as a business education student in the morning and a student secretary in the afternoon. In addition, my transportation to and from school was by school bus from Arvin.

January of 1956 was the big move to BC on the hill. Due to the illness of my supervisor, I had to do a lot of packing and labeling of boxes in order to make the move easier for all of us.

Everyone was full of excitement that came with the move from limited and crowded conditions on the high school campus. The only drawback that I remember was the new campus was not completely landscaped. This condition was certainly not good for "white buck shoes," one of the shoe styles at the time.

I was one of the first graduates from BC on the hill in June of 1956. The ceremony was held in the BC stadium. My job as student secretary in the Business Ed Department ended but, fortunately, I was hired as a "floater" to help in various offices throughout the campus for the summer. Just before the fall semester began, I was offered the full-time secretarial position in the English Department by Paul Gordon, the department chair at the time. My career in that department ended in May of 1999. I left many footprints on the campus but took with me fond memories of many interesting people and activities.



Charlie Mae Abrams Littlejohn,  
Class of 1956

*Charlie Mae Littlejohn was a BC graduate the year of the Big Move, and then went on to keep our English Department running smoothly and beautifully for 43 years. – Editor's note*



Lowell Dabbs

## The First-Class College by Lowell Dabbs

When Theron McCuen addressed the first faculty meeting on campus (or one of the first) he reported that he had received a phone call from a woman criticizing him for having allowed such a tall, gaudy, and expensive flag pole to be constructed at the taxpayers' expense just outside the Administration Building.

He told us that he replied: "Madam, we live in a first-class country, with a first-class flag, and I wanted a first-class flagpole!" We all applauded.

*-- Lowell Dabbs, for many years a BC Professor of English and Department Chair, retired to become a full-time writer and observer of Santa Barbara coastal life. – Editor's note*

# MOVING UP TO FORT KNOX

by Greg Goodwin



William and Frances Maranda

In the spring of 1956 William Maranda took a “temporary” job to help move Bakersfield College from the site of Bakersfield High School to its new campus “on the hill.” Ed Simonsen, who supervised the move, was impressed with the 23 year old Maranda and offered him the job of night caretaker. Maranda continued at the college another 35 years and his maintenance duties put him in contact with almost every college employee.

The entire Maranda family has a long history with BC. Maranda’s wife, Frances, was a BC student at the old campus and worked on the Renegade Rip. Their sons and daughters – Terry, Larry, Sue and Connie – each attended BC. Connie has worked in the Admissions Office for the last 25 years. William’s brother, Ray Maranda, was a BC athletic trainer for 26 years.

During the move of 1956, Bill Maranda remembers being kidded about his many trips to “Fort Knox,” a reference to all the district money being spent on the new campus. The real gold, however, was in the contributions made by the Marandas and the memorable experiences they shared in their partnership with Bakersfield College.

*(Thanks to The Source: Bakersfield College Community Magazine for the photo and much of the content of this article.)*

## BC PEOPLE WE WILL MISS

**BOB CLARK.** Administration go-to guy. Helped bring big name speakers to the college.

**CHARLIE DODGE.** An alum who spent his life in service to Bakersfield and Kern County.

**MARY KAY EZELL.** Head of the CSEA Union, member of the Archives board, who ran the campus and the union from the counseling office with a wonderfully husky voice.

**EVELYN HEBER.** Lovely lady in the bookstore with a helpful attitude and a ready smile.

**LLOYD HOKIT.** Professor of Agriculture. A disarming smile and wonderful sense of humor; he pretended to be a “simple country boy” but only foolish people missed his intelligence and wit; no one missed his delight in his students.

**JOY STEITZ.** Served in various administrative assistant positions ranging from Evaluations Clerk in the Records Office to Secretary to the Dean of Instruction in her 28 years at BC.

**JACQUES THIROUX.** Professor of English and Philosophy. Author, actor, and above all a devoted teacher.

## Donations to the Archives

We would be grateful for any of these kinds of donations to the Archives!

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