

Reflections of Edward McLaughlin

While on a visit to London, Jesse Coates persuaded me to come to LSU for sabbatical leave from my university – Imperial College. LSU in 1967 was a very different place than it is now. The Tiger Train, consisting of open wagons with side bench seats and brightly colored canvas tops, was pulled by a farm tractor. You could hop on and off, even between the official stops, if you were nimble enough. I'm not sure that today's buses are an improvement for campus transportation. The offices in chemical engineering in many cases were not air-conditioned, which made summers pretty tough going. In the department, the machine shop superintendent, Larry Veilleux, performed daily miracles with equipment that, to say kindly, had seen better days. That did not seem to adversely impact the students, however.

I don't remember who told me, but he said that the best recruiting tool to bring students to college was the prospect of spending a good part of life looking at the rear end of a mule. If you look at the achievements of the LSU engineering students

in industry or academia, you are impressed by their quality and the positions they occupy. In fact, this was the motivation that drove me, in later years, to recognize their successes and, of course, to seek their support both financially and on advisory committees. Eventually I pushed this activity to such a level that at a birthday party held for me by a well known lady, Mildred Voorhies, wife of one of our distinguished professors, Alex Voorhies, I received as a gag gift, a church collection plate with a red baize lining. In response to my surprise, she said that I was such an efficient beggar, there was no doubt, the gift was appropriate and she was sure I could put it to good use. Naturally I did, by eventually placing it at the entrance to my office and encouraging faculty to deposit their loose change from their foreign trips. I now have a significant collection of foreign coins!

What impressed me most on our first visit to LSU was the friendliness of the faculty and the easy relationship of faculty to students. The engineering students, in general, were always

motivated and a pleasure to teach. Women students in the early days were a scarce commodity in the classes, but their numbers have increased dramatically over the years. In fact, I was motivated to find out in later years, who the first woman to graduate in engineering was. She is a delightful lady known as Gail Wilbur who graduated in 1937, and she is still alive, living in Shreveport, known as Gail Wilbur Baker. Some things I have failed to succeed at. Probably the one that pains me the most was my inability to find a photograph of the first person to graduate in engineering; that is of Thomas H. Montgomery, who graduated in 1869 and who was also the first graduate of the University.

Finally, coming from London, I was impressed with the price and availability of farmland and managed to secure a nice hide-away in the Tunica Hills of West Feliciana. You may not be pleased to hear me say that this was a major factor in my staying at LSU, even when distant sirens summoned me elsewhere. LSU and the Tunica Hills are now part of my *raison d'être*, but London and Belfast still hold many fond memories for Aine, my wife, and our children.