Hello, and welcome to Texas State! My name is Margaret Vaverek and I work as a Reference Librarian in the Alkek Library. I’m also a proud graduate of this University. I’m delighted to have been asked to talk about the history of this very special place and how that history relates to the idea of sustainability on campus and in the San Marcos community.
The area surrounding the San Marcos Springs has been sustaining life during every known period of human habitation in Central Texas, from Paleo-Indian through the present. The springs and the rich assortment of plant and animal life that flourishes at the springs, have been, and continue to be, a strong attraction to people. Paleo-Indian artifacts have been recovered in excavations in and around the headwaters of the San Marcos- Those artifacts document a civilization over 12,000 years old- now THAT’S what I call sustainability! Something to give us all pause for thought as we ponder Texas State University and her place in this long story.
In fact, it is impossible to tell this story without frequent mention of water and/or the River that begins right here on our campus. The Spanish founded various missions here and are credited with the naming of the River in 1689. The town of San Marcos was founded in 1846. General Edward Burleson was one of our founders and he built his cabin above the headwaters of the river in 1848. Burleson served Texas as a soldier, Legislator, Texas Ranger, and even Vice President of the Republic of Texas. He lived in his cabin until his death in 1851. At which time he became the first person buried in what was to become the State Cemetery in Austin. The original Burleson cabin was destroyed during a storm in 1917. A replica of the cabin was built about 50 feet from where the original had stood on the hillside overlooking the springs, as part of the Aquarena Springs tourist attraction.

In addition to the cabin he called home, Burleson also established a gristmill where Salt Grass Steakhouse is now located.
One of the truly unique features of this place is a sustained commitment to formal education of one sort or another stretching back over 125 years. The river was, once again, a key factor in bringing one of those early educational enterprises to San Marcos.

One of the earliest examples of eco-tourism took place here back in 1885 when a traveling preacher thought this would be an ideal spot for a Chautauqua program. The Chautauqua movement had begun in Chautauqua, New York several years earlier. A Chautauqua brought entertainment and culture for the whole community, with speakers, teachers, musicians, entertainers, preachers and specialists of the day which attracted visitors from all over this area. Participants camped in the Texas summer heat and took refreshment and recreation from the San Marcos River. They even had a small steamboat “the Tom Thumb” for pleasure rides on the river during the 1888 Chautauqua season! Participants spent days going to lectures in an outdoor “tabernacle” which was built in 1886 atop the hill where Old Main now stands. Today that hill is known as Chautauqua hill, a tribute to its earliest educational roots. The Chautauqua was an annual and very popular event, in San Marcos for about 10 years. Then, the movement lost popularity and that 11 acre hilltop sat empty for awhile.
The hilltop was quiet but, just below the Federal Government took advantage of the water available to establish what would become the oldest federal fish hatchery west of the Mississippi built here in 1893. The bodies of water surrounding the J.C. Kellam and theatre buildings on campus today are the remnants of the old Fish Hatchery.
President Lyndon Johnson, our most famous alum, was instrumental in getting the fish hatchery property deeded to the college in 1965. Here too, we find evidence of our past sustaining our present. Our Aquatic Biology program is now housed on the grounds of what was once the Fish Hatchery, continuing a long tradition of stewardship and learning in that place.
When a School for teacher training was proposed for San Marcos in 1899, all the legislature asked of the city was a donation of land. Chautauqua Hill seemed the perfect spot on which to create such a school. And soon the building we now call “Old Main” was erected
It stands today as a rare specimen of the Victorian gothic style which characterized academic structures of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In fact, Sam Houston State in Huntsville had a very similar structure until it burned in 1982. The similarity is explained by the fact that both buildings had the same architect, Mr. Edward Northcraft. Mr. Northcraft’s Daughter, Lucy Northcraft Burleson, was a member of our first faculty as both a teacher of English and our first Librarian.
The first 303 students came through the doors of the school on Sept. 9th, 1903 for classes at what was then called “Southwest Texas State Normal School”. The students were here to obtain teaching certificates, not college degrees. Of course, that’s not the only thing that has changed on campus over the years. The average “out of pocket” cost per session at the Normal was about $150 (including books, fees, board). That may not seem like much but, then again, a sirloin steak dinner with all the trimmings cost about 35 cents in 1903!
One member of our very first class was a woman named Lucy Phillips. She entered in 1903 on opening day and went on to graduate with her teaching certificate the following year. She then taught school in various cities in Texas and California for many years and her experience was, perhaps, typical of the thousands of students who would follow in her footsteps up that hill and into the teaching profession throughout our history. What was extraordinary about Lucy Phillips, who later married Joseph Gough, was how she delighted students in later generations with her stories of what Old Main was like, when it was new. She spoke of it just a couple of years before her death in very vivid and fond terms, telling a current student of that time “There was the smell of fresh paint and varnish everywhere, I remember workers putting window panes in as we sat in class.” Mrs. Gough died in 1995, at the age of 109!- Having sustained a 90 year link for us to that first class of students.
In 1905 a woman named Elena Zamora enrolled in the Normal school. She is believed to have been our first student of Hispanic origin on the hill. She became a teacher, married Daniel Patrick O’shea, and later became an author. Her 1935 novel “El Mesquite”, tells the story of the open country of South Texas from the perspective of an ancient mesquite tree. O’Shea covers the area's political and ethnographic history, with details of daily life such as songs, plants and folk medicines, recipes, and more. It is said that she wrote this book to help Tejano children know and claim their proud heritage. The book was republished by Texas A&M Press in 2000 and is available in the Alkek Library.

In 2009, Texas State granted degrees to over 1,200 students of Hispanic origin and Today, Students of Hispanic Origin comprise nearly 25% of our total student population. One cannot help but think that Elena Zamora O’Shea would, indeed, be pleased to know that the trail she blazed here over 100 years ago has helped lead us to this point in our history.
The students of those very early days were part of a very different place. The school administration saw itself as guardians of the students in place of their parents.

The faculty and administration of the college took their obligations seriously. They required study hall every day after classes and saw to it students were kept busy on the college farm and other places around campus working for minimal wages.

There were rules prohibiting dancing, drinking and dating, and any student who wished to leave the hill needed the permission of the President before doing so.

In the late 1920s The Dean of Men, Dr. Henry Speck recalled a midnight phone call from Miss Lula Hines, acting dean of women. Horrified, Miss Hines reported that a co-ed and a male student had gone to San Antonio together and had not come back. Deeply concerned, Dean Speck tried to obtain more information. "Have they been going together?" he asked.

"Oh. Yes," replied the dean of women. "I understand they are married."
Those students who earned certificates in the “Normal School” days were expected to teach in the public schools upon graduation, as a means of “paying back” their education.

Many of our graduates have become teachers and influenced generations of students in Texas and beyond, in ways that cannot be measured or studied. Others have entered other professions and we now boast an alumni population which has featured everything from a United States President to award winning writers, researchers, singers, scientists and the list goes on. That trend of diverse professions will, most certainly be sustained in the future by the students we have today.

The diversity of Professions pursued by our students became possible as the school grew from a Normal School, to a two year and later a 4 years Teacher’s College. We have retained a strong commitment to teacher education throughout our history but we dropped “Teachers” from our name in 1959 and we became Southwest Texas State University in 1969, to be followed by our latest name change “Texas State University-San Marcos in 2003. Whatever the name, students here flourish in an ever changing and challenging academic environment. We have gone from being an institution where one could obtain only a teaching certificate to an institution which today offers 101 bachelor’s, 88 master’s and nine doctoral degree programs, with more on the way!
“Our Texas State World” means many things to many people. At one time, the campus was home to a “Demonstration School” which served as both a laboratory for student teachers as well as classroom space for the San Marcos public school system. This created a situation by which it was possible for a student to receive their entire education—Kindergarten through the Master’s Degree on the campus of the college—many times in the same buildings! For those individuals this was a very special place. They arrived here as children and left as young adults. The campus was, indeed, a sustaining force in their lives.
One of the most valuable sustaining influences on any campus is that of a dedicated faculty. From Principal Harris who led that first group of 17 faculty to Dr. Trauth and the over one thousand full time faculty we have today. Our faculty members are here today because they are committed to their profession and to the students they teach. There are great stories to be told about some of the faculty who have made this place what it is today.
On a hot summer day in 1916, mathematics professor Dr. S.M. Sewell affectionately known as “Froggy”, went wading into the brush- and weed-choked San Marcos River. No place was deeper than three feet, and he decided that the school needed a park.

In 1917, the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries leased the college four acres of land along the river. College workers, armed with mud scrapers and mules, cleaned the river bottom, built up the banks and smoothed the slopes.

It was called Riverside Park until 1946 when it was renamed in honor of Sewell, upon his retirement from the College. When he wasn’t teaching Math, Sewell could be found at his beloved Riverside. He taught swimming and lifesaving classes to countless students. He even had a habit of swimming in the River during the winter, this is a picture of him, in the winter of 1940- when he was 72 - and that’s snow on the ground!
His wife supervised all the female bathers at Riverside Park and paid very strict attention in seeing that the bathing suits of the day were modest. Shoulder straps on suits had to be wide enough to hold 3 buttons! Sewell Park today is a far cry from the weed choked spot “Froggy” first saw over 90 years ago. And I wonder what Mrs. Sewell might think if she were to glance at the banks of the river in Sewall Park on a hot summer afternoon these days???

© Margaret A. Vaverek, 2010
1926 was a very memorable year for the college; it witnessed a milestone- the first school sponsored dance! Up until that time, dancing had been strictly prohibited as an activity that was not in keeping with the best interest of the students. Dr. Robert Tampke of our music Department was summoned by President Evans and given the task of putting together an orchestra for the event. There was, however one “little” condition for this orchestra. Under no circumstances was there to be a Saxophone among the instruments! Dr. Evans reasoning was that the Saxophone was thought of as a rotten instrument, even by good people!” When Tampke recounted the story years later he said “you knock the Saxophone out of an orchestra and brother, you haven’t got much left!” He ended up with a piano, a drummer, a trombone, a trumpet, a fiddle, and a clarinet. He said finding music for that odd combo was difficult but he had talented friends in the area and the orchestra & dance were a success.
Empress Zedler came to our campus in 1948. When she earned her Ph.D. in 1953, she became only the second female on campus to hold that degree. [Dr. Rhetta Murphy of the History Dept. was the first], Zedler’s research focused on the diagnosis and treatment of Dyslexia and on non-verbal children who have the capacity to develop speech but do not. These fields of study are well known today but they began right here, in this place, many years ago. Dr. Zedler even took some children with her to New York City and demonstrated her speech therapy techniques on national television- appearing on the Today show in 1958! She set a standard for excellence in teaching and research on this campus which is an enduring legacy to all who have come after her.

Dr. Everette Swinney taught in the history department for forty eight years prior to his retirement in 2005- including a 13 year term as Chair of the Dept. He had two great passions which have helped us become what we are. He was a dedicated classroom teacher and he also spent many years working in the area of academic governance, especially with the Faculty Senate- which recently celebrated its 50th anniversary.
Our sense of place has grown over the years to include areas beyond Chautauqua Hill and the Main campus. In 1994, the University purchased property that included both the Aquarena Springs tourist attraction and the restaurant (today known as Saltgrass) which overlooks General Burleson’s historic dam.
Eco Tourism is still flourishing in this place.

In 1946, Paul Rogers rigged a paddle boat with a glass bottom and began to take family and friends out to see the bubbling springs, plants and animals that thrived in the clear waters of Spring Lake. Encouraged by their enthusiasm he went on to develop the Aquarena Springs theme park using glass bottom boats as its main attraction. Rogers continued to add buildings and attractions to the park including a submarine theatre, sky ride, space needle, pioneer village, restaurant and hillside trails. Aquarena Springs became a favorite tourist destination from the 1950s through the early 1990s. The shadows of the theme park remain, at least for awhile, but Aquarena center now carries on that rich legacy of eco tourism that the Rogers family began here, all those years ago. We now have a solar powered boat, wonderful wetlands, and institute dedicated to the study of Texas rivers.

The river continues to provide both livelihood and recreation for the campus community and the town at large. General Burleson’s dream of a thriving community here has, most certainly, been sustained by the generations that have come after him.
Since the Middle Ages, institutions of higher learning have had a unique position within their host communities. This was characterized early on by students and faculty wearing academic gowns both on and off campus. Thus, making them easy to spot within the larger community. The practice, while common in Europe, never really caught on here in Texas. Nonetheless, the phrase “Town & Gown” is still used to describe the relationship between a city and the schools within their borders.

With our latest name change to Texas State University-San Marcos in 2003 the University and the town became linked in name. However, this was certainly nothing new. The school and the town have always worked together for mutual benefit over the years. Neither of us would be the success we are today without the other. The townspeople of San Marcos provided much assistance in those earliest days of the school, from helping to secure the land where Old Main now stands, to providing housing for our students in the days before dorms were built.

Today, the town still provides housing, employment, and many other services to our students, faculty, and staff.
The University has always played its part as well in this partnership. I recently learned of a Conference on Texas Water Problems and Solutions which was held here in July of 1954- during the worst draught of the 20th century in Texas. More than 500 Farmers, ranchers, bankers, industrialists, teachers, and students gathered on the campus to hear leading authorities discuss the acute Texas water problem and learn possible solutions. The talks given that day are available online now through the library catalog and the original document resides in the University Archives. This serves as one example of “Town-Gown” coming together for mutual benefit. That long tradition of working together continues today.
The University provides a workforce, educational and economic opportunities, volunteers for great programs such as “Bobcat Build” and much more for this community we all share.

We’ve covered a lot of ground in the last few minutes, thousands of years of history— in fact. But the things which sustained our predecessors through all of that time are the same things that have brought us all here today. A vision for a better world and a sustained commitment to playing our part in making that vision a reality **in Our Texas State World and beyond.**