



Contributed by Jim Douglas

The Nichols-Cuba Connection, 1931-1959



From 1931 to 1959, men from 36 states and 33 foreign countries took advantage of the many opportunities offered by Nichols Junior College.

Nichols became a familiar name to many secondary schools in the eastern and mid-western United States as well as numerous south and central American countries and the Caribbean. Of all the countries represented at Nichols, however, students from Cuba numbered the most by far.

A total of 55 Cuban students attended Nichols Junior College between the years of 1931 and 1959. While never large in numbers for any given year (usually between four to six), many of these students made significant contributions to the school. This was particularly true during the mid-1930s when Cuban students held leadership positions in various organizations (including editor of the student newspaper, and president and officers of student government), and were valuable players in various sports, especially soccer. (A "Cuban Trophy" for the most outstanding soccer player was first awarded in 1937 and was still being given in 1958.)

Nichols, in turn, was a warm and welcoming place for students living far

from home. With six Cubans attending Nichols in 1937, for example, the campus celebrated the 35th anniversary of the inauguration of the Republic of Cuba. The Cuban students spent weeks preparing special talks on different aspects of their homeland and held a special dinner, complete with songs and Cuban cuisine. The student newspaper issued a "Souvenir Issue Dedicated to Cuba" that printed the talks and included an editorial praising the authors for their planning and execution of the events. "We cannot emphasize too much," wrote the editor, "how happy we are to know and have such fine fellows as our friends and classmates...Viva Cuba! Viva los Estados Unidos!"

How did Nichols attract students from Cuba and other parts of the world? For one thing, in the 1930s Nichols was one of only two New England junior colleges for men. It was also the only New England junior college focused on business administration, and it offered courses that were considered upper level and transferable to four-year institutions. Some heard about the college through friends, family, or other relatives who attended Nichols or knew someone who had. There was also an official "clearinghouse" in Havana that

maintained a list of recommended business administration schools, including Nichols. Some American companies doing business in Cuba, such as the Bank of Boston, would also suggest Nichols as a great place to study and learn American business and culture.

Upon graduation, most Cuban students returned to their homeland to work in family businesses, start their own, or take a position in a government department. Some continued their education in America or Cuba before returning to Cuba or settling here. Some maintained the friendships they formed while at Nichols. When relations between the two countries dramatically worsened after Fidel Castro came to power in 1959, a number of prior students fled Cuba, leaving all their worldly possessions behind, and, with the help of former classmates in some cases, made their way to America and rebuilt their lives.

Such was the Nichols-Cuba connection.

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