

# O.U.'s Changing Traditions

By Sigfrid Floren

This is the first of a series of articles about traditions and near-traditions that have enlivened student life at O. U. through the years.

ON a university campus something done the first time is new; the second time, convention; the third time it is likely to be called a "tradition." What Webster has to say has little bearing on the matter. Therefore, while the University of Oklahoma is a comparatively young institution, there has been time for a great many "traditions" to develop.

Traditions—like the times—were different forty years ago. Most of the things that students of '04 or '14 would have declared to be tradition no longer exist. Some were smothered by the increasing number of students and teachers; by the divisions into separate schools and colleges;

fighting began whenever and wherever a large group of the students met. In the later years of the fights a certain day was agreed upon, and roughness was to be confined to that day. Of course, quiet did not always reign until the prescribed day. Often strategy and some of the most critical fighting was staged beforehand.

"Several sophs were caught by some freshmen, blind-folded, faces painted black, and turpentine poured down their backs," is a notation from September 15, 1908. That year the sophs won the tussle—their first victory in eight years. That's one reason that it stuck in the minds of the old-timers. Since the freshman class often numbered nearly twice as many as the sophomore group, the sophs were consistently the underdogs.

Another year that the sophs came out on top, they tied more than a dozen freshmen to trees down by the Canadian River and left them there. If their plans had been successful, those freshmen would not have shown up for the fight the next morning. Some farmers discovered the chained youths, however, and proceeded to cut down the trees, freeing them in time for the scrap.

A more effective strategem was used later. Through pull with the superintendent, a leader of one class was able to use vacant rooms in the state hospital across town to lock up several of the opposition class leaders until the fight was over.

Beginning as a simple annual contest between only freshmen and sophomores, it grew into a war with freshmen and juniors lined up against sophomores and seniors. The fight in the fall of '13 was the last one—by official action of the University administration.

Even in that early day, however, the inevitability of the disappearance of the old class spirit was becoming apparent. O. U. had left the one-building, 100-student stage in its growth.

Today there is a noticeable but understandable lack of class spirit, especially of the kind demonstrated in class fights. Quite a contrast is apparent between the

pre-World War enthusiasm in class meetings and activities and that in evidence in April, 1940, when only fourteen of the 1,296 seniors attended a class meeting.

"Back in the good old days" a student was as much a member of his class as he was a Sooner. There were class songs, class yells and class functions. Under those conditions such traditions developed as the wearing of class colors or marks—the freshmen's being their "postage stamp"



or by the specialization of study in the various schools and departments. Some took on such proportions that they fell of their own weight. Some quietly died with the rise of other interests. And a few are still going on.

"Wow! Sock! Crash! Ugh! #%\*@&!! #!!" were common sounds on and around the campus each September prior to 1914. The occasions were the class fights. They began with the "natural" frosh-sophomore rivalry carried into Oklahoma Territory from older schools in the States.

It would be hard to imagine amateur fighting that reached fiercer proportions than it did in the tiny Soonerland college. This fierceness was the thing that finally brought an end to the annual fray.

Before its death was decreed by the University administration, some exciting things had happened.

Enrollment was completed and time allowed for organization of the classes at the beginning of the fall term before either side became belligerent. Near the end of the second week it was time for things to break—and they did!

Battle was supposed to center around the raising and protecting of class flags. Sometimes it did, and at other times



caps. Spasmodically other classes wore headgear of the same style but of a different color. During the territorial days green caps were worn by seniors as badges of dignity.

There was a time, after interest in intercollegiate football had taken possession of the campus, that the caps were worn consistently during the football season. After the last game, the students staged a mass demonstration around a bonfire in which they burned all the caps, and, needless to say, the better the season, the bigger the fire.

Senior lawyers are still marked by the canes they carry. This tradition was brought to the O. U. campus from outside the state, but became firmly established. This is probably the last vestige of visible class spirit.

The only additional evidence today of any class distinction is found in this statement in the *Oklahoma Daily's* Student Directory: "Freshman students at the University of Oklahoma are exempt from any kind of hazing, but proper respect should be shown senior students." The reprinting of that statement each year has itself become virtually traditional, but, just as traditionally, it goes unheeded.

Throughout the time that heated class rivalry lived, and up until a decade or so ago, the "Howdy" tradition existed. While the University was young and small, tradition required that each student should speak to every other individual at all times. Of course this could hardly be expected to survive in a Uni-

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versity of 7,000 students, and in such a non-leisurely age as the present.

A tradition at one time almost as violent as the class fights was brought to O. U. with the founding of different schools on the campus. No sooner had the Schools of Law and Engineering become well established than a spectacular rivalry arose between them. For more than sixteen years it culminated frequently in the attempts of the lawyers to capture the engineers' queen before her coronation scheduled on St. Pat's day. Engineers at times took the offensive by splashing green paint on the stone owls at the north and south ends of the Law Barn.

St. Pat's day was first celebrated by engineering students at the University in 1914. The idea originated at the University of Missouri several years previously and drifted into Norman with the coming of an instructor to O. U. from Missouri. It may now be listed among well established traditions at O. U.

"Old Trusty" has played a prominent part in the history of both St. Pat's festivities and the engineer-lawyer feud. The old, cast-iron Civil War cannon had been a gift to the City of Norman and stood unmolested in Edwards Park, north of the railroad station. That is, it stood unmolested until the engineers decided to bring it to the campus to shoot on St. Pat's day. From that day on "Old Trusty" led a hectic life. The lawyers quickly hit upon the idea of trying to steal the cannon and hide it at the time the engineers most wanted it. It goes without saying that such a plan threw fuel aplenty on the blazing rivalry.

While it was the original intention of the engineers to return the cannon to its place in Edwards Park, they realized that this would immediately place it in the hands of the "enemy." So "Old Trusty" never again saw Edwards Park, but was the object of conflict between the two groups of students for about ten years. In 1920 L. K. O. T. (Loyal Knights of Old Trusty) was organized among engineers for additional protection to the cannon. That society is still in existence although "Old Trusty" long since came to rest on the bottom of the Canadian River, so the story goes, sent there by the University administration after it had caused serious accidents.

Another result of the increased size of the institution has been the abolition of all-University chapel. O. U., like many other schools in the country, at one time held a daily assembly for all students in which there was singing, yells (on occasion), scripture reading and a talk by the president, a member of the faculty or a campus guest. The University auditorium was then the second floor of the old

Library Building (now the Education Building).

Different presidents of the University placed different degrees of emphasis on attendance at chapel. President A. Grant Evans ('08-'11) was strongest in urging all students to attend. After World War I when the auditorium could not begin to hold all the students, daily chapel was abandoned. Today, it would tax the capacity of the Fieldhouse to get all the student body under one roof—if anyone should be so rash as to try to force 7,000 students to meet.

A tradition that arose earlier and died earlier than any mentioned so far was the Preparatory School-University rivalry. An annual tug-of-war was the main test of supremacy, and was held in connection with a field meet managed by the dozen or so members of the University faculty with the assistance of Norman townspeople.

The races were on the Boulevard. To run a mile the contestants had to go the length of the Boulevard, circle the old building and come back to the starting place.

The tug-of-war feature brought seniors, Juniors, sophomores and freshmen of the University up against the preps. The prize was ice cream at Davis's. An anonymous eye-witness of the 1900 pull, writing in an old yearbook, recalled that the collegians "went down in dust and defeat." But that year the contest didn't end there.

"At chapel the next morning," he continued, "the preps tied the rope they had used to the posts in front and fastened to it a tin sign with the legend 'Preps' upon it. When the college students came to chapel there was a riot. The order was to hit a head wherever you saw it. Faculty members, in quieting the disturbance, were shorn of much of their dignity. When students began to tear the rope and tin placard to pieces for souvenirs, and to mash up the chapel seats, naturally some were wounded and bruised."

That was forty years ago. The University soon grew out of the proportions of a prep school and the tug-of-war custom ended about 1904. Most contests were becoming intercollegiate in form, opening the way for new traditions.

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## Deputies

Four Sooners are working as deputies in the office of George Goff, sheriff of Oklahoma county. They are Joe Porter Ballard, '29-'33law, Clint Johnson, '19, Keet Cargill, '36ex, and Richard C. Webb, '32ex.

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