

# Aggie ring product of evolution, tradition, love

by DON MIDDLETON  
and  
JOHN ADAMS, JR.

The vacation is finally over and we're back in the writing business. During the past couple of weeks, our minds have been anywhere but on the typewriter. That sly dog Adams was busy helping his wife have a



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baby, John III. Middleton was galavanting around half the Confederacy for an undetermined reason. So between the two of us, very little has been accomplished—until now.

Get ready to exercise your brain. America has the stars and stripes, the Olympics have the torch, Phi Beta Kappa has its key, Betty Grable has her legs, and Texas A&M has—what? If you said a cowhide bench you're wrong. If you said the Aggie Ring you're right.

The Aggie Ring is the product of years of evolution, born out of tradition and love for an institution.

The desire for a symbol to represent a student's days at A&M was first expressed in early 1889. The end result of the wish was a unique but now forgotten ring. The design selected had the letters "AMC" intertwined across its face surrounded by four small diamonds. It was cast in solid



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gold. Only two of these rings exist today. The distinctive design was used only for the class of '89 and never cast again.

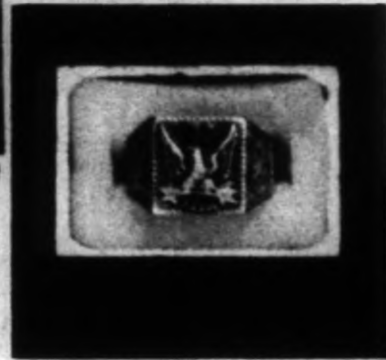
Five years passed before the forerunner of the present ring was born. Under the direction of Edward C. Jonas, '94, Commander of Company "C" and business manager of the Battalion, suggestions for the design of a class ring were solicited. From these suggestions Jonas drew up the preliminary design.

Approval by the 32 member class soon followed. Ten dollars was collected from every senior in order to contract a New York firm to cast the gold rings. Two

weeks before the June commencement the first consignment of rings arrived.

All were delighted with the ring's design and appearance. But an inquisitive senior and chemistry professor P.S. Tilson, '89, ran a test in the chemistry lab to determine the gold content of the ring. To their surprise, they found it had been weighted and plugged with lead. A close look at the other rings in the first shipment revealed the same impurities.

With commencement only



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two weeks away, reordering the whole shipment was impossible. So each senior was forced to reorder his own ring. Most members of the class of '94 had their new ring by 1897.

After considering many possible ring designs, the class of '95 selected the same ring their predecessors wore. And the ring remained unchanged until 1899 when a committee headed by Josh B. Sterns and R.J. Porter met to discuss design changes and the contracting of a new company to cast the ring.

"After much friendly argument," Sterns recalls, "we rearranged the designs and selected a combination composed of the seal of Texas on one side, a cannon and two crossed muskets on the other side. On the top oval we placed a spread eagle with A.M.C. around the top rim and a space for 1899 below."

During the discussion much concern was expressed by E.L.



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Martin to have the classes of '00, '01 and '02 adopt the same design in order to "perpetuate the design as the class ring for the succeeding years."

The Linz Brothers Jewelry Company of Dallas offered to quote the junior, sophomore and fish classes lower prices if they would meet and vote to approve Martin's idea. With the possibility of the price per ring

being raised to \$10.50 all classes concurred.

The ring remained unchanged during the next 30 years. Year after year each class agreed on the 1894 design for their class ring with only minor changes—a saber and a rifle instead of two rifles, the cannon pointing right instead of left or the eagle facing east instead of west.

In 1933 college president T.O. Walton appointed an official Senior Ring Committee to oversee the handling and any design modification that seemed agreeable with the students. The consensus was that unless controls were exercised the ring and its heritage would prove meaningless. Prior to 1933 many companies manufactured the ring and practically



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anyone could obtain a "bootleg" copy.

A five year contract was awarded to Star Engraving Company of Houston in November, 1933 to begin making Aggie rings with the class of '35.

In 1934 the state and national flags were added as background to the crossed rifle and saber. The words "A&M College of Texas—1876" were also added around the crest.

In 1939 the Registrar's office began distributing the ring in order to exercise tighter controls on those who were permitted to purchase it. 1943 saw the ring enlarged and the seal raised. When Texas A&M College became Texas A&M University in 1963 the ring underwent a corresponding change.

An estimated 75,000 students and former students today proudly wear the symbol of



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Aggie heritage and tradition. Fierce loyalty has caused many to protect and honor its meaning. There are many stories of rings being found on battlefields in Europe, Korea and Vietnam.

One member of the class of '45 lost his ring while on a fishing trip near Corpus Christi in 1952. A year later it was found between two dead Communist



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soldiers in Korea by another Aggie, class of '50.

Of course, there are also stories that tell of the lighter side of Aggie rings. In 1967 the \$6 million dollar Cyclotron was completed and operation begun. One Aggie decided to inaugurate the new atom smasher and perhaps gain a valuable keepsake by exposing his ring to the alpha particle beam. Instead of getting a mildly radioactive memento he got a ring with half the crest melted by the 65 million electron volt beam. The ring had to be kept in a lead strongbox.

Wherever Aggies go, the ring serves as a binding link with other former students. It provides ready identification with the good old college days and the comradeship acquired while at Texas A&M.

For those of you who have never been told the whole story



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of the symbolism of the Aggie Ring, here it is:

The shield on the top of the ring symbolizes protection of the good reputation of the Alma Mater. The 13 stripes in the shield refer to the 13 original states and symbolize the intense patriotism of graduates and undergraduates of A&M. The five stars in the shield refer to phases of development of the student; mind or intellect, body, spiritual attainment, emotional poise, and integrity of character. The eagle is symbolic of agility and power, and ability to reach great heights and ambitions.

One side of the ring symbolizes the Seal of the State of Texas authorized by the Constitution of 1845. The five-pointed star is encircled with a wreath of olive or laurel leaves symbolizing achievement and a desire for peace, and live oak leaves symbolizing the strength to fight. They are joined at the bottom by a circled ribbon to show the necessity of joining these two traits to accomplish one's ambition to serve.

The other side with its ancient cannon, saber and rifle symbolizes that the men of



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Texas fought for their land and are determined to defend their homeland. The saber stands for

valor and confidence. The rifle and cannon are symbols of preparedness and defense. The crossed flags of the United States and Texas recognize the dual allegiance to nation and state.



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