

The first 100 years

'Spirit of Aggieland' tune began as a summer project

By DON MIDDLETON and JOHN ADAMS
Battalion Staff Writers

Throughout the history of Texas A&M University, music has been an integral part of Aggie traditions. The two best-known Aggie tunes, "The Spirit of Aggieland" and "The War Hymn," have been sung for over fifty years.

"The Spirit" began as a summer project of Marvin H. Mimms in 1925. Mimms, a junior at A&M, had

planned to attend Army ROTC summer camp that year, but a heart murmur discovered by an Army surgeon postponed the trip.

In a handwritten article Mimms sent to the University Archives in 1967 he wrote that he was forced to spend the summer at his parents' home in Marlin, Texas. All the jobs in Marlin were filled by the time he arrived, and the prospects for an exciting summer seemed grim.

"I could look forward to just a lot of puttering around the place,"

Mimms wrote. But "during my first vacation day at home, an old thought possessed me, as it had off and on during my three years at college. Why hadn't someone come out with a real alma mater song for Aggieland?"

Bothered by the thought that A&M had been without a school song for almost fifty years, Mimms began mentally to form guidelines for the lyric to an A&M song.

Mimms' first criterion was that "the lyric must be correctly written

so as not to bring down the adverse criticism of the College English Department."

The rest of the criteria demanded that the words express a definite purpose, and lend themselves to a military cadence. Mimms' top priority was that composition be "absolutely original."

With these in mind the young A&M student began writing the song, starting with the eight-line chorus then backing up to compose the two verses. The second verse is

seldom sung.

With the lyrics on paper and a tune in his head, Mimms hitched a ride to College Station to present his idea to band director Col. Richard C. Dunn.

Mimms found Dunn in the lobby of the Y.M.C.A. and explained to him why he had come. Dunn immediately expressed interest in the song and invited Mimms to sing it for him.

While Dunn picked out the melody on a piano, Mimms sang his

song for the first time in Aggieland. The band director was so excited with the tune that he immediately phoned Col. Ike Ashburn, Commandant of Cadets, asking him to come hear the song.

After hearing the song, Ashburn "came over, put his arm around my shoulder," Mimms wrote, "saying 'That's wonderful! There will be no contest. This is it!'"

Mimms was told that a contest was being planned to choose a school song, but there would be no need of one since Mimms had written a song to fill the bill.

Dunn and Mimms continued throughout the summer putting the finishing touches on the score and making preparations for the mass printing of the song.

Dunn composed individual scores for each instrument in the band, and when the musicians returned in the fall the first number they learned was "The Spirit," which, according to Mimms, Dunn labeled "March No. something or other."

At the first yell practice of the year "The Spirit of Aggieland" was

played and sung for the first time by the student body.

"The Aggie War Hymn" was a product of the imagination of a Marine private, spurred by the love for his school. J. V. "Pinky" Wilson had left A&M in 1917 to serve with the American forces in Europe.

While sitting in a trench in the Champagne-Argonne Forest, Wilson composed the words and music to the song, which was first sung by Wilson and his comrades as they marched into Germany.

When Wilson returned to the United States and Texas A&M, he formed a quartet that performed the song during intermission at the Queen Theater in Bryan, in exchange for free admission.

Eventually, the song caught on with the students and was adopted as the school fight song. The corps first sang "The War Hymn" before a football game with Howard Payne College in 1921.

Formed in the now-famous Aggie "T," they started a tradition that still lasts, that of beginning every home football game with "The Aggie War Hymn."

'Fightin' Aggie Band' . . . a 13-man beginning

By DON MIDDLETON and JOHN ADAMS

Now forming at the north end of Kyle Field — the nationally famous "Fightin' Texas Aggie Band." Little did anyone suspect that the cadets who were organized into a musical organization in 1895 would one day be a military band of over 100 members.

In the early 1880's and well into the '90's, a gentleman named J. R. Fisk was employed by the college as drummer, whose duty it was to beat the drum for reveille and other formations. Fisk was paid \$20 per month to perform these functions. When Fisk gave up the job of drummer in 1895, J. F. Holick was

hired as bugler. It was Holick, along with Bryan resident Arthur N. Jenkins, who organized the first college band.

John K. Woods, a member of that first band, wrote to Professor D. B. Cofer, University archivist, that the band had as their sponsor little Anna Banks, five years of age.

As Anna Banks grew, so did the Aggie orchestra. The next school year, with G. W. Gross replacing Holick as bandmaster, the group numbered eighteen.

The band began wearing the familiar lyre somewhere around 1907. Since then a fierce feeling of autonomy and pride has characterized the Aggie Band.

From 1897 to 1924, five men led the band as bandmaster. They were

F. H. Miller, George W. Tyrell, B. P. Day, Alois Slovacek and George Fairleigh.

Until 1940, the band existed as a single unit known as the "Regimental Band," "College Band," or simply "the A&M Band." It was in 1940 that the band, now numbering almost 200, was divided into the Infantry Band and the Field Artillery Band to correspond with the organization of the Corps.

Serving as band director at that time was Col. Richard C. Dunn, who was appointed to the position in 1924. Dunn guided the band until 1946 and was instrumental in arranging the score for "The Spirit of Aggieland."

When Col. E. V. Adams took the helm as director in '46, the organization of the band was again altered.

With its membership down to barely more than 100 the Aggie Band was restructured into the Maroon and White Bands that exist today.

Adams retired in 1973 after 25 years of dedication to the band, and was replaced by Maj. Joe T. Haney. Haney now directs over 300 musicians in the intricate drills and spirited marches that have made the band a symbol of Texas A&M.

The Aggie Band has long been known as "The Heartbeat of Aggieland." Whether it be a Corps review with full military ceremony or a midnight yell practice for a ragged crowd of football fans, the band has always been in the forefront playing the strains of "The War Hymn."

The "Men of Kyle," as band members have come to be called, are one of the oldest institutions on the A&M campus, and proud of it.



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MEXICAN RESTAURANTS

FEA, studies printers' costs

DALLAS — An energy cost reduction study focusing on the nation's 17,000 small commercial printers has been initiated in a joint project of the Federal Energy Administration and the Small Business Administration.

FEA Regional Administrator Delbert M. Fowler of Dallas said the study is designed to develop practical dollars and cents methods for smaller commercial printers to conserve and reduce energy costs.

The study is the second of seven to be undertaken as a part of the small business energy cost reduction program. It will begin with detailed on-site energy audits and analyses of selected small commercial printers.

The results of these audits will be incorporated into energy cost reduction guides to be published by the Printing Industries of America, Inc., and disseminated among its membership and other small printers in the industry.

PIA also will hold energy cost reduction workshops throughout the country, utilizing affiliated associations, FEA's regional offices, state energy offices, and regional and district offices of the SBA.

On-site energy audits will begin in August, 1976, with introduction of the guide planned for the printers national convention in November.

"This effort is another example of FEA's commitment to be responsive to the nation's 9.4 million small businesses," Fowler said. "FEA's office of small business will continue to develop specific programs which serve this vital segment of our economy."



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