

A&M traditions often comical, always unique

By JOHN ADAMS

Almost 100 years ago to the north, six prospective students and their way to the Texas A&M campus, which consisted of two buildings—Old Main and Gathright Hall. Void of identity with their new school, they, along with those who followed through the years, have molded Texas A&M into a unique institution rich in heritage and tradition.

Throughout this rich heritage of Texas A&M, many traditions have evolved to distinguish the University and its student body as one of the most renowned and spirited worldwide. A not too uncommon comment within the confines of A&M's 500 contiguous acres is the feeling among many that once an event, or activity transpires twice it becomes a tradition. While comical and unbecoming at times, this has little to do with the more unique traditions that embody the famed "Aggie

Spirit."

The Aggie War Hymn, Silver Taps, Senior Boots, Bonfire, the Twelfth Man, Muster, the Aggie Ring, Gig'em Maroon and White, Yell Leaders and Reveille are just a few of the most well-known and distinguished traditions. Traditions perse did not begin to evolve at A&M until the 1890's during Lawrence Sullivan Ross' (1891-1898) administration. Fired with the enthusiasm and popularity which Ross embodied, intercollegiate football began at Texas A&M in 1894. Shortly thereafter a "band" of 16 members was organized by a local cobbler, Joseph Holick, to provide the "good ole pep" for athletic events and Corps reviews. Many Aggie traditions were to evolve from the enthusiasm surrounding the gridiron. Filled with the burning desire to support the team, win or lose, the student body slowly molded into a single body of uncompromising loyalty to Texas A&M.

During the final years of the Ross administration, three traditions surfaced, which more so than any others, are probably the dearest to all Aggies: Muster, Silver Taps and the Aggie Ring.

Muster had its birth during the late 1880's and early 1890's. By the turn of the century, Aggies gathered each spring to reflect on "fallen comrades" and their alma mater. Musters were held after 1920 on San Jacinto Day, April 21. By mid-1940 the tradition was ingrained on the annuals of A&M. Yearly, Muster is held on the campus, in every state of the Union and at numerous locations world-wide, uniting all Aggies in a common bond. No other university in the world has such a tradition which, on a given day, unites all its students and former students.

Identity with fellow students is a hallmark of the spirited campus. An expression of this loyalty is the solemn tribute to a deceased student at a Silver Taps ceremony. Silver Taps

was originally homage paid by the lone corps bugler in front of Old Main on the evening of the cadet's death. After Old Main was destroyed by fire in 1911, the ceremony was moved to Goodwin Hall. With the construction of the present Academic Building on the former site of Old Main, the tradition was moved in front of the building between the steps and the flag pole. Silently in the darkness of the evening students gather to reflect on the departed Aggie. Piercing the night are the notes of "Silver Taps" and the crack of 21 rifle volleys, fired by the Ross Volunteers. While only a short ceremony, the minutes seem like an eternity. Quietly the gathering disperses, into the cool night, mindful of the silence and meaning of the evening.

Silver Taps will be held September 7 for Susan Marie Zenner, Glen Allen Burns, Daniel Edward Copp and John Mallory Davis.

In 1894, the Senior Class designed the first Aggie Ring. One side displayed the star of Texas, the other cross rifles. An eagle and the letters "A&M" accented with the class number "94" was engraved on the crest of the ring. Annually, Aggie seniors await the arrival of what older former students call the "gold nugget." The ring has been altered only slightly since 1894. Design changes have made it larger in penny weight. Notwithstanding these changes, the meaning to each Aggie has remained the same throughout the years.

As the college grew between 1900 and 1920 the spirit intensified. The common hardships, the remoteness of the campus and the esprit de corps of the cadets influenced the intense loyalty of all Aggies. During the 1920's, events transpired to augment the already well-established traditions. In 1921 J.V. "Pinky" Wilson introduced the famed fight song of Texas A&M — The Aggie War Hymn. The words were first penned by Private Wilson while standing guard duty on the banks of the Rhine River during World War I. Upon returning to Texas A&M, as a student in the fall of 1921, the yell leaders encouraged Pinky to "jazz" up the tune for use during the November 1921 Thanksgiving clash with Texas University. The song was an instant success.

In 1926 the Former Student Association and Yell Leaders pestered me to write a second verse that could be more readily used at all athletic events," Wilson said. "I felt at the time, as I do now, that the student body has a mind of its own and would, regardless of how many ver-

ses are added, continue to sing the first and most meaningful rendition!" Notwithstanding Wilson's feelings, Yell Leader urgings won out and the second verse was composed late in 1926. On many occasions the second verse has been introduced to incoming freshman classes only to fail acceptance completely.

Only months after the War Hymn was adopted, a unique set of circumstances transpired. The Aggies, with a record of 6-1-1, won the 1921 Southwest Conference Championship. As a reward for their efforts they were invited to Dallas to take part in the Dixie Classic (or Cotton Bowl as it is known today.) The January 2, 1922, game pitted the Aggies against Centre College, a nationally known football powerhouse. During the game the famed Aggie Twelfth Man Tradition was born.

During the course of the bitter contest Texas A&M suffered numerous injuries to players. To augment the depleted Aggie squad, Coach D.X. Bible sent a yell leader into the press box to find E. King Gill, '24. Gill, a basketball player and former football player, was called from the stands to suit up in case a substitute was needed. His willingness to support the team has resulted in the Aggie student body standing during each football game to support the team. The ever-present dull roar of the Twelfth Man, united as one body, has haunted visiting teams to Kyle Field each season.

During the 1920's the block "T," the University colors of maroon and white, the term "Aggie" and senior boots were all adopted. The block "T" is today the trademark of the

nationally renowned Aggie Band. Prior to 1923 the school colors were red and grey. In September, 1923, James Sullivan, athletics business manager, officially dressed the football team in plain maroon colored jerseys with grey pants." Sullivan's reasons for the change were that "the darker solid colors will add to the appearance of the team in that it will make it look heavier and more uniform." Prior to 1920, students and former students of Texas A&M were referred to as "Farmers" or "Cadets." With the expansion of the agricultural programs, the term "Aggie" was coined.

The senior boots, a symbol of four years of hard work in the Corps were added in 1920-1921 when the Corps discarded its grey West Point-style uniform in favor of the more modern olive drab.

A custom which yearly unites both the freshman class and the student body is Bonfire. Constructed by freshmen, it symbolizes the burning desire of each Aggie to "beat the hell outta t.u." The Bonfire was first built in the 1920's to celebrate a victory over the University of Texas. During the late 1920's and 1930's the bonfire tradition was altered. To unite the student body, it was built just prior to the Texas game. Originally the bonfire was built of old outhouses and discarded lumber; by the mid-1940's it changed to emerge as the massive structure constructed in recent years. The effort, unity, sweat, class spirit, and planning which go into this endeavor is bigger than life itself.

These traditions of Texas A&M have made the University and student body truly unique.

Joining Aggie fraternity brings responsibilities, maturity, service

By W. C. Freeman

Executive vice president for administration
Written for Jack K. Williams
President, Texas A&M University

I welcome you to Texas A&M University, and I congratulate you on your decision to join a fraternity of current and former students now numbering more than 100,000 in College Station and throughout the world. The latter — our alumni — are men and women serving in leadership roles, engaged in compassionate and effective service to others and attached to this University by strong bonds of loyalty and affection.

You enter these ranks at a truly auspicious time in the history of this institution. Currently in the midst of a year-long Centennial observance, Texas A&M points with justifiable pride to its record of service and achievement during its first 100 years. On October 4 you will have the opportunity to take part in a special celebration, the Centennial Convocation, commemorating the formal opening of the school in 1876.

Because of the heritage created by those who preceded you, membership in the Aggie fraternity does not come without responsibilities. Texas A&M is now your University. Its reputation and accomplishments are in your hands. From this day forward you are Texas A&M, and your ac-

tions will reflect on the honor and good name of your University.

Although changes have been many and great in the 100-year history of Texas A&M, one thing has remained constant: its basic purpose. That purpose is to provide a foundation of intellectual maturity on which students might build their lives. Its primary mission is to stimulate and promote within each student a lasting spirit of intellectual curiosity, which is a necessary ingredient of progress.

I greet you warmly as members of the 1976-77 freshman class . . . the Class of 1980. May happiness and friendship and the satisfaction of growing in knowledge crowd your days.



C. W. Freeman

Application of student expression through talk, influence stressed



Fred McClure

By FRED McCLURE

Student Body President

It is indeed a pleasure having you join the ranks at Texas A&M University. Hopefully your associations here will prove valuable not only in your academic pursuits but in your overall student life as well.

Those of us directly involved in Student Government serve as the "voice" of the student body by expressing student concerns and opinions to the faculty and administration in policy areas affecting each of our lives. We also encourage the development of and provide the means for responsible student participation in the organization of student affairs. One of our major objectives is to enhance the quality and scope of education here at Texas A&M.

To be effective in these areas, it is

necessary that you, along with the upperclassmen, feel free to express these concerns to us for action. Without effective communication from the student body, an otherwise dynamic Student Government could become somewhat dormant.

We ask that you involve yourself in those activities which interest you, whether it be within Student Government, the Memorial Student Center, Corps of Cadets, Residence Halls Association, Student Y, or any other organization designed for student involvement. Many students volunteer much time and effort to afford the best living experience possible for young people attending this university. To find out more about any of these organizations, drop by their offices for a visit or attend the MSC's Open House on Saturday.

More importantly, I hope that you can gain the most from your educational experience here, providing you with the necessary tools to become an even more productive and contributing citizen.

One again, welcome to Texas A&M and into our Aggie-fold. The traditions and spirit that you will be exposed to rate second to none anywhere within the universe. My only hope is that these characteristics of being an Aggie will mean as much to you as they do to me and thousands of Aggies throughout the world.

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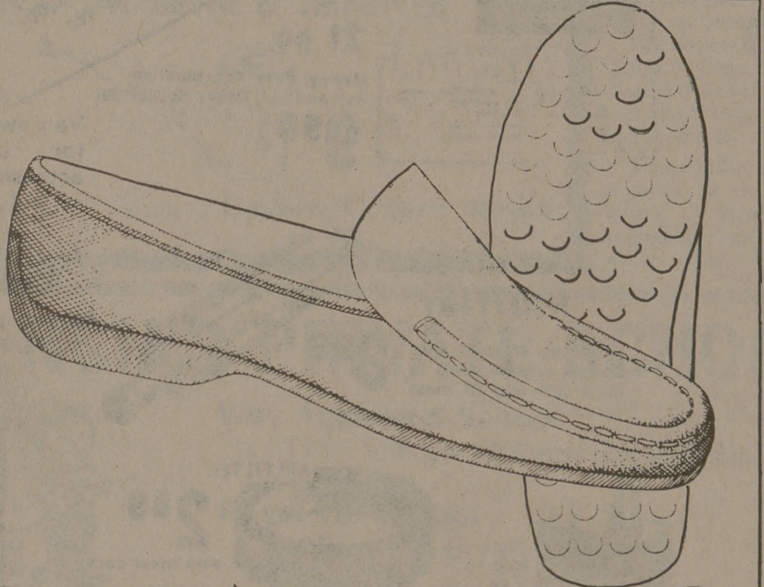


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