

focus

# Aggie Mementos

## Aggie gifts now big business (\$)

By LIZ NEWLIN  
Battalion Staff

Students attending this University often leave with something called "Aggie Spirit." Many others visiting this University leave with something collectively called "Aggie paraphernalia."

Wool caps, toilet seats, mugs, pennants, pencils, fine china, stickers and T-shirts are just part of the multimillion dollar business that serves both friends and enemies of Texas A&M.

Some items, like Aggie joke books, offend some and make them mad. But most of the paraphernalia is purchased proudly for other Aggies or potential Aggies, say local bookstore managers.

"It's fairly big because it's more or less tradition," said Dennis Rother, manager of Loupot's Book Store. "It's fun to poke fun at yourself. It's publicity for Aggies and for themselves."

Martha Camp has worked at the University Book Store since 1951 and is manager now. She's had opportunities to establish book stores on other college campuses, but she says she won't.

"They buy the stuff because they're proud of their school and they like to show it."

"National salesmen who call on the store say there is more 'esprit de corps' here than any school they trade with. Only about 10 schools in the nation have the same caliber of spirit," she said, smiling.

Many students and relatives promote Texas A&M, especially through T-shirts, Camp said.

"When there are kids at home who can't decide where to go, some students will send them a shirt and show them the school," she said.

"Not many other students do that."

John Raney, manager and owner of the Texas Aggie Bookstore since 1969, said sales of paraphernalia have grown because of enrollment increases and because it's a fad to wear shirts and other items with school names on them.

"Most customers during football season are former students," Raney said. All the booksellers noted an increase in business during football weekends. Customers then are mainly people who haven't been to the University for a while and want to take it back with them, they said.

Before Christmas, many gifts for non-Aggie residents increase sales.

The biggest-selling item with the Texas A&M design is the T-shirt.

"The design is what sells the shirt," said Raney. "On a basic T-shirt, there's not a whole lot you can do." Shirt styling is more important on a jersey, he added.

At the University's Memorial Student Center store, T-shirts comprise 80 percent of gift purchases, said manager Howard DeHart. About 20 percent of the store's volume is generated by Aggie mementos.

Profits from these sales supplement the book department, which loses money because of the "close" price mark-up, DeHart said.

Most profits from the bookstore, about \$100,000 this year, are distributed to recognized student organizations, said Dr. Carolyn Adair, director of student activities.

Although jokes are the focus of many items, some reflect the serious, "spiritual" side of Texas A&M. Books on the University's history and reproductions of Aggie songs and traditions remain popular, they said.



Ideas for souvenirs come mainly from one source -- commercial manufacturers who specialize in the business.

Located around the country, they devise T-shirt designs and gift items for most colleges and universities. A few Aggies have successfully marketed gift items in local stores, but not many.

National businesses make the items for bookstores, drug stores and other businesses, said DeHart, who has worked for the MSC bookstore since 1969.

Former students, he said, request the store to carry a "certain quality of merchandise."

"Former students suggest lots of things we carry in that part of the store," DeHart added. For example, fine china with the University seal was stocked after their requests, he noted.

When manufacturers try to "sell" a new item to MSC store, DeHart said. For instance, the store will not sell Aggie joke books or some of the

Bookstore owner Raney also accepts non-professional gift ideas.

"A number of people come by," he said, "with belt buckles, Aggie Christmas cards, glasses holders, toilet tissue, and other things."

"Most of the time it is not successful, unless they know where to go and how to sell it."

T-shirt ideas are produced by the University Book Store and Loupots Book Store. Designs depicting a Corps of Cadets outfit or special group have a ready-made market.

Monkeys clad in Aggie clothes sold by one of the stores are the creation of Joan Underbrink of Bryan.

"I thought they'd make nice Aggie souvenirs," she said. Making the monkeys for birthday gifts expanded into making them "for an extra job."

Underbrink is toying with another idea, one that's not on the market yet. She envisions Aggie diaper bags with the "TAM" emblem on one side and the child's name on the other.

When manufacturers try to sell a new item to the MSC store, DeHart and his staff decide what will offend anyone or damage Texas A&M.

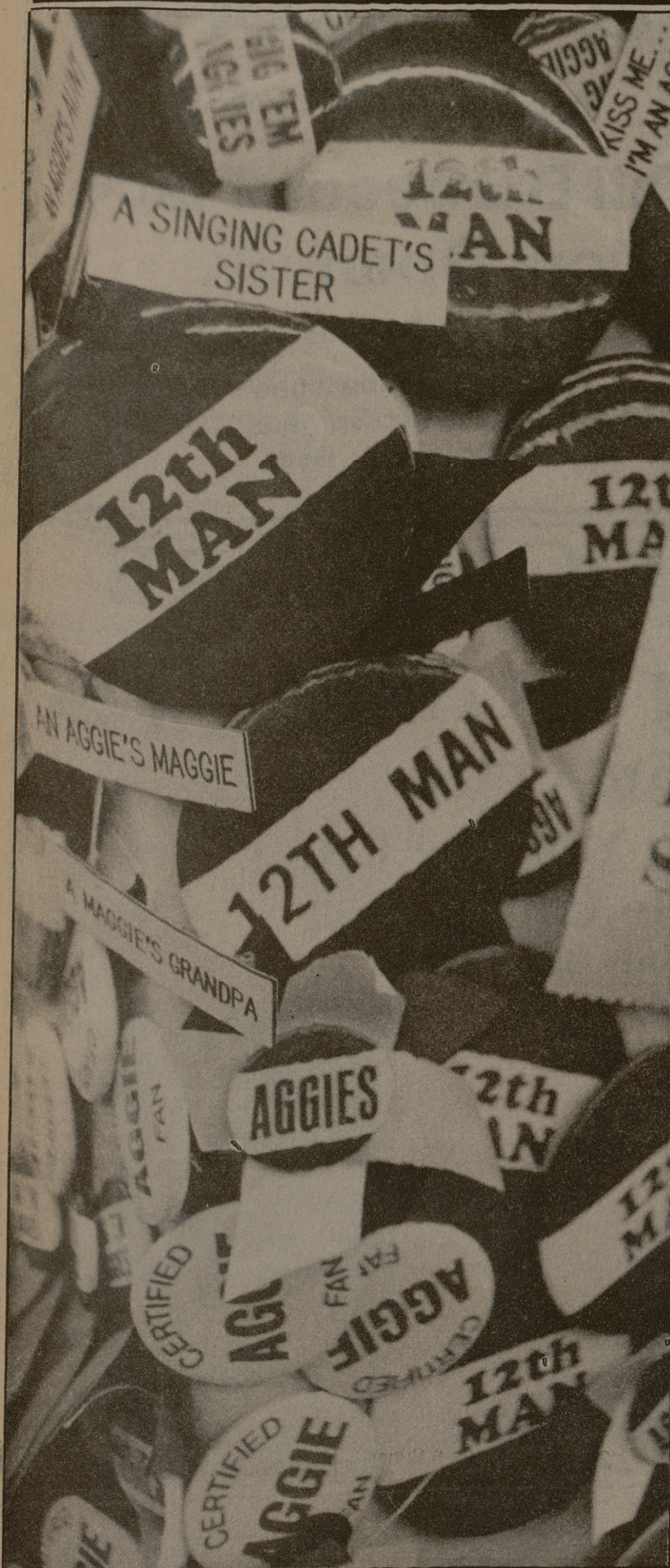
"We don't like to have any joke items in the store," DeHart said. For instance, the store does not sell Aggie joke books or some of the crude merchandise which is fun at the school's students.

"If there's any doubt whether we won't carry it," he said.

Jewelry with the Aggie emblem was recently added to the store line, and DeHart said it's becoming popular. The mainstay of the book stock, though, is still TAM.

The most successful student-made merchandise in MSC store is a group of backpacks, he said.

Half the packs carried the TAM emblem, and the students have since formed a company to manufacture the carry-alls, which are still sold in the store. Some student-produced items, he said, "don't make it."



Battalion photos by Susan Webb

## Aggie Jokes. . . on the decline

By MARY C. BECKER

There had been rumors that the Aggie joke was dying or at least not feeling too well. I was assigned to check it out.

My only lead was Dr. Sylvia Grider, English professor at Texas A&M University.

Grider had expressed her ideas on the subject in a paper she presented to the Institute of Texan Culture on December 15.

One of the reasons Grider gave for the eventual demise of the Aggie joke was the false stereotype of the 'typical dumb Aggie.'

The image of the all male, military 'cow college' is no longer true, Grider said.

The general overexposure of jokes could end up as overkill. "It's hard to hear a new one," she said.

Jokes are a limited commodity. There are only a so many combinations and the tired old Aggie joke has almost exhausted them all.

The typical joke cycle is funny only for awhile. "It's no fun to tell a joke to someone who has already heard it," Grider said.

Joke cycles include fad jokes that are based on contemporary events or songs. There are also topical joke cycles such as football jokes during football season and of course, the gimmicks, Grider said.

The gimmicks are the visible sign of the decline of the Aggie joke according to Grider.

The gimmicks demonstrate the principal of a media switch. An idea from one media is transformed into another form.

"When a joke cycle goes from an oral joke to joke books and from here to this form," she said holding up one of the items from her collection of Aggie gimmicks, "that's about as far as you can push a joke."

Joke telling is an oral tradition and when a joke goes through a media switch, the tradition may be lost.

What interested Grider in collecting paraphernalia was the variations on one idea. A brick may commercially become an Aggie Bowling Ball or an Aggie Toothpick.

As long as the gimmick demonstrates the principal of the joke, it remains true to stereotype. The irra-

tionality of putting a plug on a pencil for an Aggie Calculator or a plug on a saw for an Aggie Chainsaw, would be a typical Aggie joke.

When the paraphernalia gets so far from tradition and becomes nonsensical or even unpleasant, Grider said, the tradition is lost.

The abundance and price of the gimmicks may determine how much longer the Aggie joke will be around. The gimmicks rely on first sight reactions and usually aren't as funny the second time around. And there is not much funny about paying \$7.95 for an Aggie chainsaw.

What threatens the Aggie joke's existence is Texas A&M itself. The stereotype of the typical Aggie is weakened by: a large, diversified student body which includes women and civilians; A&M's prestigious re-

search programs and the school's varied curriculum.

An Aggie joke can serve contradictory functions.

Aggie jokes are a regional variation of Polish jokes according to Grider. They can be used as a form of ethnic slur that ridicules Aggies.

However, Grider noted Aggie jokes are also "one more expression of that eliteness of A&M," because most of the Aggie jokes are told by Aggies.

Grider said there is no way to predict if the Aggie joke will ever disappear.

Grider's other theory is the Aggie joke cycle never completely dies out. It's dormant long enough to get another audience.

"Same old jokes, just a new audience."

## ...or sign of times

By KATHRYN GOFF

Cartoonist Jim Earle said he also believes the familiar Aggie jokes may be fading. However, he says there is still a unique style of humor at Texas A&M.

Earle, a Battalion cartoonist for 24 years, has noted changes in the campus through the years, reflecting them in his illustrations.

When Aggie jokes first started, Earle said, students learned "not to get mad" and took the kidding to the point that they began most of the jokes themselves. However, he said, Aggies have become less tolerant of the jokes, and are paying less and less attention to them now.

The Corps acted as a cohesive group for the whole campus before, Earle said. But now, students are "semi-isolated" and don't identify as much with their campus.

He said this also makes them have fewer chances to get together with other people to discuss and laugh over their problems.

However, he said humor still survives.

Aggies can find humor even in unfortunate events, Earle said.

"If someone slipped on a sidewalk, people (at A&M) would laugh about it," Earle said, not to make fun of them, but because it's something to laugh about when it's over.

The familiar "whoop" can be heard at dining halls on campus whenever someone drops food, or silverware.

Earle said he thought arguments about the sacredness of the Memorial Student Center (MSC) lawns, taking off hats inside the MSC building and what constitutes a "good Ag" have at times become overheated.

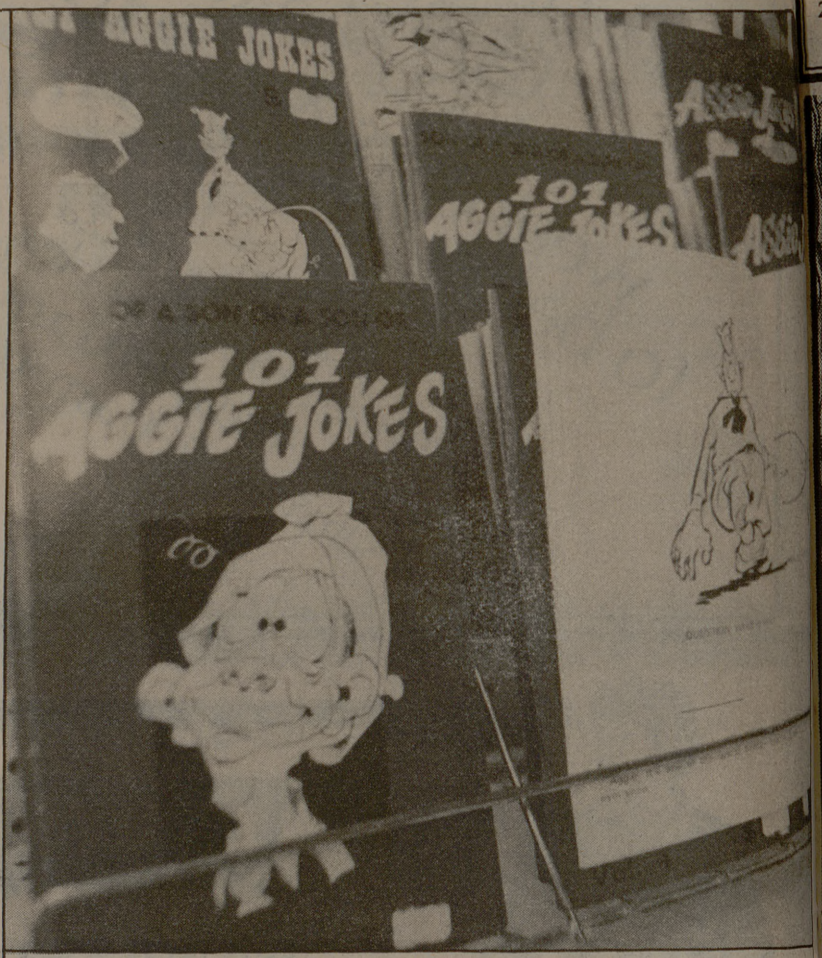
"Aren't we lucky to be able to get mad about unimportant things," he said. "We don't care what goes on in Egypt or in Israel, we care about the food (served on campus) or taking hats off in the MSC."

Earle said that actually the Aggie jokes' decline is not important, compared to the Aggies' overall capacity for humor.

He said people should all look for humor no matter how serious life becomes.

## T-shirts tell it all

- I'm proud to be an Aggiee, ~~Aggie~~, Aggei
- I are a student at A&M college.
- sdrawkcab ti od seiggA (Aggies do it backwards)
- No where else but Aggie-land.
- Hullabaloo Caneck Caneck
- My Dad is an Aggie
- Baseball, hot dogs, apple pie and A&M
- I'm a little TAM Aggie
- Eat more beef (before the Texas game)
- Even Jesus loves Texas Aggies
- The joking's over
- Next year is here
- 20-10
- Zips '81 (or others)
- Help me, I'm an Aggie
- Kiss me, I'm an Aggie
- Anywhere else but College Station



### Before...

In 1928, the biggest thing besides the class ring was a watch fob like it, mainly because nobody wore anything but uniforms.

By 1940, coveralls with the Texas Aggie emblem were popular. Later, T-shirts developed as a popular medium for expressing love and devotion to the University, and really increased in popularity in the 1960s with a high enrollment with civilians and women . . .

Jud Loupot -- owner of Loupots Book Store since 1932

