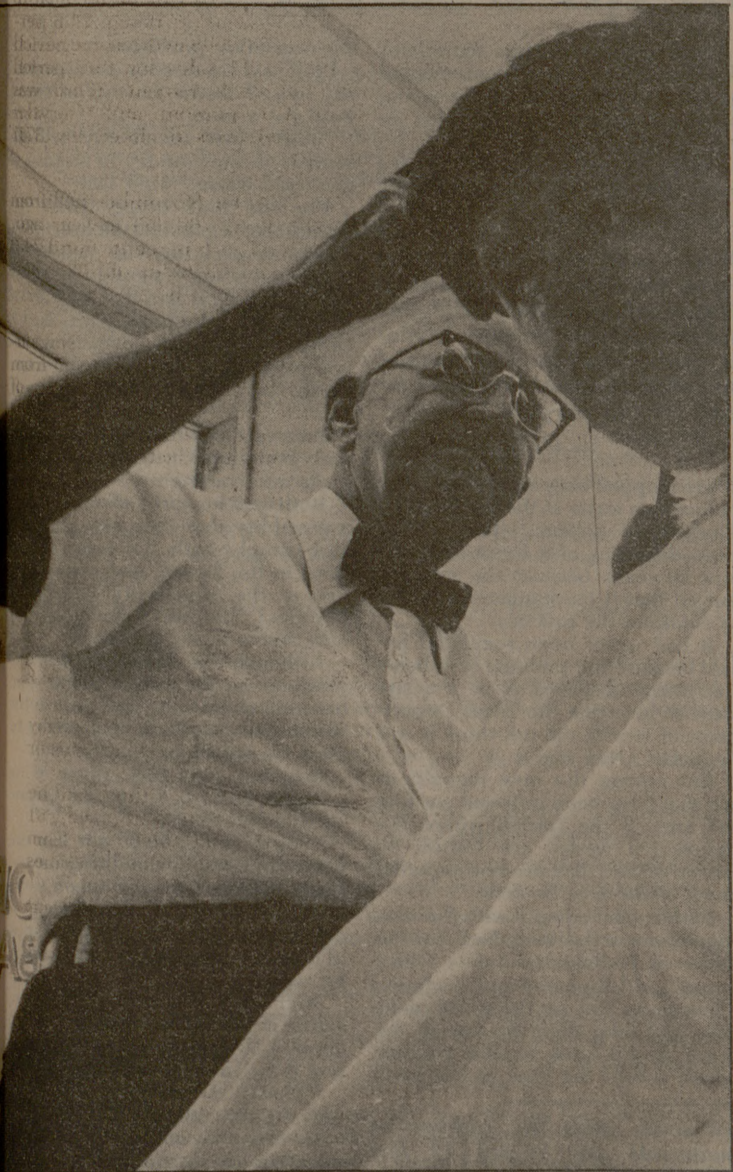


campus

Barber cuts up while cutting Ags' hair



A.A. Wilbanks cuts the hair of a Texas A&M University physical plant employee. He started cutting hair during WW I and kept it up for 49 years.
Battalion photo by Doug Graham

By VENITA McCELLON
Battalion Reporter
An Aggie cadet walks in the door to see seven other cadets waiting with legs crossed while skimming through copies of National Geographic. They sit in a row under a sign that says "Haircuts — \$3.50."
"You've got a long wait, kid," one cadet quips to the newcomer. The man in demand smiles and says, "Well, you can say you're in good company."

The man is A.A. Wilbanks, and on the Thursday before an Aggie football game and military review he is very much the man in demand.

The line of patient Aggies is a familiar sight for Wilbanks, who has been cutting cadets' hair for 49 years.

The North Gate Barber Shop on College Main shows the many years of Aggie influence. A picture of the 1977 Bonfire hangs on the wall with an outdated calendar which says, "A great place to live, learn and grow: AGGIE COUNTRY." The barber shop has changed little over the years — its green enamel barber chairs would rarely be seen in styling shops today.

The 84-year-old Wilbanks, with clippers in hand, would be another rare sight.

Wilbanks, who says he has more hair filtering down his front than he does on the top of his white head, adjusts the bow tie that completes his almost uniform-like white shirt and dark pants. He wields his scissors like the professional that he is, and uses hot lather from a mug as he discusses Aggie football with his customers. It all comes easy after 56 years of experience.

A native of Palestine, Texas, Wilbanks first learned to cut hair as a soldier in World War I. While a soldier, he also earned the Purple Heart, a military decoration awarded a soldier wounded in action.

Wilbanks was wounded with the same shell that caused another sol-

dier to lose his leg. "I should have zipped when I zagged," he said with a smile. "I won't forget it if I live to be 100."

His Purple Heart is displayed in a corner of the barber shop in a glass case built by a junior cadet from the Texas Aggie Band.

Wilbanks left the army after the war ended and went to barber school in Fort Worth 55 years ago. He came to College Station in 1930, and has been in the same building on College Main for 42 years.

Wilbanks remembers the Texas Agricultural and Mechanical College of that time.

"Everybody looked just alike. There sure weren't any ponytails on campus," he said. "Back when the service men were here it didn't take you but about five minutes to peel it off." Wilbanks said he used to have between 40 and 50 customers a day.

Some of them still frequent the shop. Wilbanks talks of one man who he cut for the first time in 1931. The man still comes in.

Wilbanks has also seen changes in A&M, but said he thinks they have been for the best.

"There's a lot of good-looking girls here that weren't here then," he said. Wilbanks also said that the women seemed to brighten the campus.

Wilbanks takes a dim view of retirement.

"I'm too old to chase girls," he said with a smile. "I've got to do something. I don't need much rest. That's what runs me crazy." Then, with a wink, he added, "I'm going to retire when I'm 90."

Aggies move out of the waiting line and into the barber chair, and each gets a haircut to go along with Wilbanks' conversation and humor.

"You won't need your curling iron this week," Wilbanks says to one cadet after a flat-top haircut. "You won't need your blow dryer either. Just stick your head out the window about two minutes and it will be dry."

Strip mining causes water pollution

Reclaiming strip-mined land is not a problem, says a Texas A&M University urban and regional planning specialist. Water pollution that accompanies the strip-mining effort is the actual difficulty, he said.

"We are not experiencing great problems with refurbishing the strip-mined land, because that has already been done successfully over and over again," said Wolfgang G. Roeseler, head of the Department of Regional Planning.

"The water pollution that goes hand-in-hand with the mining is difficult to detect, and that is creating the serious problems."

Particularly in Texas, vast quantities of lignite, a type of coal, lie just below the surface. Other chemicals in the earth are exposed by the mining and begin to react with the elements. A good rain may cause chemicals in the earth to combine with the water, creating arsenic, which runs off and eventually can find its way into a city's water supply.

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Surveys have shown most tires on vehicles are underinflated. The rolling resistance of underinflated tires is much higher than properly inflated tires, costing as much as one mile per gallon. This loss can be stopped by maintaining a recommended 28-32 PSI measured when the tires are cold.

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