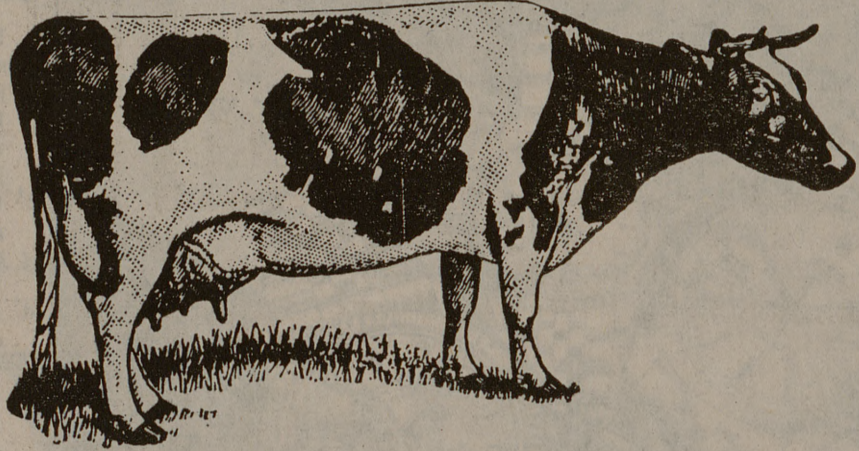




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Mascot stealing once a Texas A&M tradition

Editor's note: This week is bonfire Push Week, another in a long line of Texas A&M traditions. Today and Friday, The Battalion will publish articles on Aggie lore submitted by members of Student Government's Traditions Council, who gathered their information after combing through the University Archives.

By Steven Ihnen
Special from the Traditions Council

Mascots of the Southwest Conference have seen plenty of action off the playing field as well as on. The stealing of mascots from other schools was once a pastime of A&M and was practiced on every school in the Southwest Conference.

On Jan. 16, 1917, Rice University's mascot was the unfortunate victim of mascot theft. This theft represented perhaps the most extensive ordeal a mascot has ever endured.

The mascot, for what was then known as Rice Institute, was a 6-foot, 200-pound, stuffed canvas owl named "Sammy." It attended the A&M-Rice basketball game in Houston as usual, but was left unguarded after the game. Left in the gym, the owl fell prey to an eager group of victorious A&M basketball players who took the mascot to College Station as a trophy.

The players paraded him around town, and even the University's president got in on the act by posing for a picture with the newly sworn-in ROTC cadet owl.

Houston newspapers published the pictures and quoted the Aggies' invitation: "If Rice wishes to claim their bird and even think that they are able to take him back to the 'insti-toot,' they can find him at 39 Milner Hall, College Station, Texas."

Accounts of the mascot theft were denied at Rice, where it was claimed that the original owl was still around and that A&M cadets had made a duplicate.

A group of Rice students organized to form the "Owl Protective Association," a group whose job it was to recover the owl. Members of the group sent a detective to A&M to locate the exact whereabouts of the mascot and report back to them. The detective's midnight search through campus via the steam tunnels proved fruitless.

A second rescue attempt was made in which another detective was sent. But this time, the detective posed as a newspaper reporter

looking for a story. The Aggies obliged the reporter's request to see the owl. That night the OPA met with the detectives and asked about the owl's whereabouts.

The plan was then put into action. The headquarters of the expedition was Kyle Field. A network of communications was established by having students station themselves within sight of each other.

Then, four of the 16 students planned to retrieve "Sammy" who was locked securely behind the Armory door. Using knives to carve out the lock, the students drew the attention of one of the night watchmen.

The watchman entered the building, and one of the students darted

"If Rice wishes to claim their bird and even think that they are able to take him back to the 'insti-toot,' they can find him at 39 Milner Hall, College Station, Texas."

— Aggie challenge to Rice

through the window in plain view of him and climbed down the side of the building. The watchman chased the student, leaving the coast clear for the remaining three students. After escaping from the watchman, the first student returned just in time to discover another watchman attempting to sneak up on the party.

Two of the other three students made a dash for the ground floor and ran to the headquarters to issue a report. The watchman discovered the last OPA member and was walking him out when the student managed to escape in the direction of Kyle Field.

At the headquarters, the OPA decided to charge the building, break down the door to the Armory and make a quick exit before the cadets awoke. With fire extinguishers in hand, the OPA stormed the main building and approached the Armory door.

Forming a human wedge, the students broke the door down and discovered the owl sitting in the corner of the room. They poured gasoline on the owl so that they could burn it if they got caught.

While exiting the building encountered another watchman filled the silent air with the sound of his .44-caliber pistol, consequently waking up every cadet in the building. But the group members managed to get away with their cars and took off for Houston.

The whole plan was worked perfectly until the H&TC train scheduled stop in College Station. Cadets boarded the train in the OPA. Aggies hung out of the train's windows when they saw the Owl gang driving on the tracks alongside the tracks. The Owl gang turned its getaway cars around and took the first road it found.

Five miles down the road, the cars broke down, so it was a hind along with five men in the Aggies from the car. Owl. But misfortune struck again when its other car broke down and ran out of gas.

The OPA split into two groups. One carried the owl mascot through the woods, and the other returned to the broken-down car to get gasoline. But bad luck struck again. The crew fixed its car, broke down and ran out of gas again.

As a last resort, one of the students went to the nearest town, Millican — to buy gas.

It was later discovered that the car's gas tank was punctured and more gasoline would be needed. The meantime hundreds of cars, motorcycles, wagons and busses loaded with eager Aggies searched for the owl.

As a final resolution, the OPA stripped the skin off the owl and burned its 200-pound body. The cadets found the group at the time to see the last flames while the "Elusive Four" made way to Houston with the skin of the owl.

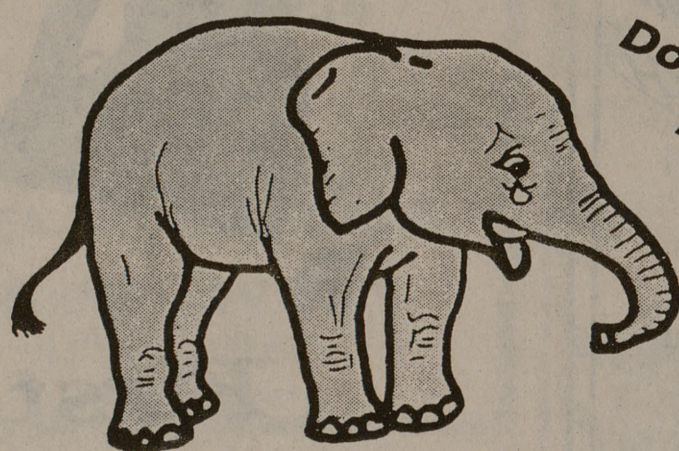
The cadets, knowing the owl existed, went in search of it. They captured the remaining OPA's. The "Elusive Four" of the Aggies by splitting into groups of two — one group of the Aggies, while the other group, took off to Navasota.

Through the help of a group of hunters, the skin made it to Navasota and on to Houston. It took three days for the skin to arrive at its home.

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