

Opinion

Enthusiasm for tradition has obscured facts

Call them idealists, dreamers or just plain gullible, but the people who tell you that Texas A&M's traditions are waning have heard Grandpa Aggie's stories one too many times.



Mike Sullivan

After spending a few nights looking through old editions of *The Battalion* dating back to the late 1800s, I've come to the conclusion that one of the biggest traditions at A&M is talking about traditions.

Much of the rhetoric we hear today about our once-friendly campus and how polite, clean-cut and honest Aggies used to be isn't very original. Students at A&M have been voicing concern about the loss of these values for at least 65 years.

In 1924, a student wrote in *The Battalion*, "We must admit that there is a certain element in the student body which is a disgrace to the school when it goes into action in theatres and other public places."

"... That this is a serious problem and demands immediate action as is indicated by various complaints we hear every day."

Student behavior must have been a legitimate concern during the Roaring '20s when you consider that less than

2,000 cadets were generating daily complaints.

The truth is that Aggies never were the perfectly polite, refined young men many of us envision. They booed and yelled obscene things at sporting events and were even vulgar toward actresses in campus plays.

In 1933, *The Battalion* wrote in a review of the cadet's behavior at a play, "... we find that this same Corps of Cadets has been erroneously characterized and that the following terms — discorteous, undisciplined — fit the cause better with the addition of moronic, banal and asinine."

A 1931 editorial exposes similar problems with student behavior. "It is easier to be graceful winners than losers, but before we can consider ourselves sportsman-like and gentlemanly, we should train ourselves to be able to accept defeat without rudely expressing our sentiments to our guests."

I only looked through about 60 old *Battalions*, spanning almost 100 years, but I found enough editorials on such topics to safely say that students' bad manners were a big issue back in the early days.

At one point, *The Battalion* even made a plea to hitchhiking cadets

(which included most all of them) to stop being so rude toward the motorists who gave them rides. Evidently, their behavior was causing motorists to stop picking them up.

"When we learn to give motorists the benefit of doubt, to display even a mite of courtesy, and to respect the rights of

And there was vandalism back in A&M's good old days, too. A 1948 *Battalion* editorial explained, "Some students ... entered the band's dormitory and opened a hot water line on the top floor. The escaping steam and water ruined instruments, radios, uniforms and other personal effects to an estimated value of \$1,000."

"... Even our favorite term of two-percent fails us here."

I also happened to land on an interesting 1933 editorial about vandalism. It seems that some students kept shooting out with their rifles a lamp on campus called "Prexy's Moon." Apparently, it was extremely expensive to keep replacing the "traditional" light and the editorial writer said that if the students didn't stop breaking the lamp, "it would be relegated to the ranks of has-beens and become only a memory."

I guess vandalism replaced "Prexy's Moon" as tradition because no one I've talked with has ever heard of the once-famous lamp.

And then there's one of my favorite tradition topics — the "Howdy Tradition." Aggies have been fighting the tide with that "tradition" since at least 1932.

Sounding much like a modern-day *Mail Call* writer, an Aggie explained in 1932 that the "Howdy Tradition" had fallen, saying, "Let's think it over and

revive this tradition which was once prevalent on this campus..."

It may have been prevalent in the 1800s when the entire student body consisted of cousins and friends of cousins, but by 1932, and of course by saying "Howdy" to everyone you see on campus is not only impractical but sincere.

It's funny how looking at ourselves Grandpa's mirror makes us feel we're not living up to the lofty standards of yesteryear when, in fact, Aggies carrying on today as they always have only in greater numbers.

It's easy to glorify A&M's past by talking late at night with friends showing our parents around campus but as one Aggie wrote in 1933, "The quality of the Aggie Band... times... we are inclined to allow our enthusiasm to obscure the actual facts."

Mike Sullivan is a senior journalism major and the Opinion Page Editor of *The Battalion*.

The Farmer's Write column will appear in Thursday's issue from now on. Lewis Grizzard will no longer run on Monday, Wednesday and Friday editions. A new feature, Once upon a time in Aggieland... will appear in Tuesday editions beginning next week. The new feature will consist of old columns and editorials published in The Battalion many years ago.

Tradition missing at A&M

Editor's Note: The following anonymous editorial originally appeared in *The Battalion* April 10, 1919 and was entitled "What does A. and M. lack?"

Ask yourself this question. Answer it for yourself after excluding all minor and insignificant trivialities. What is vitally missing? What would make this institution greater? What would make you love it more? What would make its graduates love it more? What would make all people respect it more? Is it not TRADITIONS? Not in the sense of tales of the past. But in the sense of something that would connect the present with the past history of the school. Something that would touch deep below the surface of commonplace matters. Something that would fill the freshmen with awe and the graduate with love. Something that would make your college a place in your heart and give you something to carry away with you that all thru life would thrill you at thoughts of your Alma Mater.

Every great school and college in the world has its traditions. They are sacred to its sons. To a great extent these traditions are lacking at A. and M. Too many students come for a year or two and go their way lightheartedly. Too few of those who enter remain until they depart as graduates. Too many fail to see the seriousness of a man's college. Too many take the daily incidents and occurrences as all that the college has to offer. Too few consider that this is their stepping stone to life and that manhood comes to them while in the Halls of this old institution.

What can alter these conditions? What can change matters? What can create traditions for the college? What can create an atmosphere of seriousness, age and love about the institution? This is a most difficult question. This school is different from most great colleges. Conditions are not the same as are found at the universities, the very names of which stand for all that could be desired along this line to every citizen of the country. We must work out our problem for ourselves.

There was a time when the retold tales of various fights, trips and games served this purpose. That day is long past. We have outlived our name of "Roughnecks." Such things are past history. The telling of such incidents no longer thrill the Fish and give him a consuming desire to leave the college

with his name interwoven in another story to go down to the coming classes. The new man has not the respect for the institution that he had years ago. The man leaving the institution has not the thrilling and exciting adventures to recall that were for the men of other days. Something must be done.

We offer the following as a possible means of supplying this lacking character to some extent:

Would it not be a great thing for the College if every class that graduates in the future leave some permanent memorial on the campus for the daily observation of the new classes? Would it not be a greater thing if every class that has gone out from the old halls should return to leave a similar memorial of themselves? If these two things were done, would not the freshman be met with something that touches deeper than the belt and bayonet of farmer days? Would not the man leaving the college have more in his heart to remember and love than as things now are? Would not the graduate feel more interest in his Alma Mater if he knew that the symbol of his class was being daily honored and respected by the students in school? Would there not be a more inviting atmosphere for an occasional return of graduate classes? Would there not be inspiration for reunions at the college during active sessions when the young men in attendance would meet and greet the older ones who have gone before? On the whole, would not a student at the college take himself and his school more seriously? Would there not be an indescribable something constantly at work on his conscience urging him to stick to the fight out and do his best? Would there not be an elevated standard at the college in regard to all things if such conditions could come to pass?

Think it over. If you believe what has been said, work for it. Keep on working. Read what will be said in future editions concerning this phase of the college. The officials of the institution will be asked to contribute their opinions from time to time. Consider them. And if the traditions of the A. and M. College can be revived and presented in permanent form to the coming classes and if the graduate can be made to love his Alma Mater more, you yourself will come to love and appreciate the years of your life spent here as will never be possible otherwise.

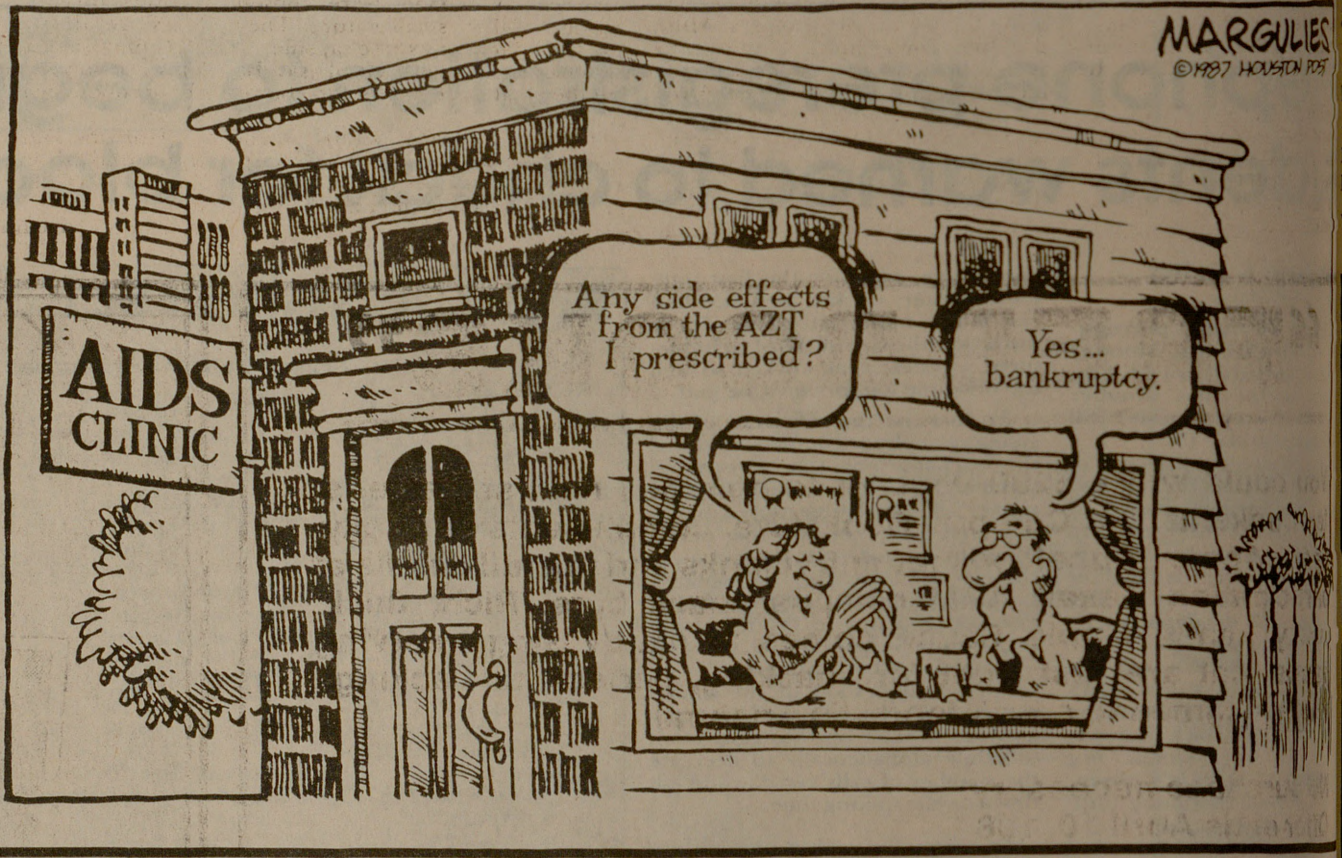
our touring hosts, the possibilities of our hitch-hiking opportunities will increase immensely," an Aggie wrote in 1949.

Even the Aggie Code of Honor — Aggies don't lie, cheat or steal nor tolerate those who do — was violated enough to merit editorials.

A 1940 editorial entitled "Thou Shalt Not Steal" proclaimed, "It is difficult to reconcile oneself to the fact that there are thieves among the student body of A&M."

"... Yet, certain petty thefts occurring from time to time, as well as rarer larger ones, form conclusive evidence (that there are thieves)..."

The editorial sounds strikingly similar to some of the responses *The Battalion* got from students when we ran a story this semester about A&M having more thefts for the 1985-86 school year than any other Southwest Conference university.



Mail Call

Catcall tradition

EDITOR:

I became extremely disappointed while doing a bit of studying in my dorm room. Sitting by an open window, I heard shouts of approval — and a few of disapproval — coming from neighboring windows while members of the opposite sex crossed the parking lot below. "Just a few guys afflicted with spring fever," I thought, feeling sure they would quiet themselves soon. Up until this time, they had kept their remarks turned down, anyway. As more buddies joined in the "fun" though, the catcalls became a little ruder and much louder.

And all this time I thought this was a University (you know, where you go to get an advanced education after you've conquered the basic how-to's of life).

You know who you are, guys. Surely I need not take this space to explain those basics on common courtesy. And since it will take more time than I have to teach you that genuine interest, not just courtesy, can be a motivator of kindness, I must ask you to rely on what I assume you know about — consideration for other persons. (Yes, I know what might happen because I assumed). Just try to remember to be nice. Not every body is so lucky to be as "popular" as you are.

To put it in a perspective not so personal, imagine this: Mr. and Mrs. Proudly happen to be walking through this parking lot with their pretty teen-age daughter who can't wait to become an Aggie. They unmistakably hear someone scream, "Hey, Buffalo, Sbis's that way!" To comfort their not-so-chubby daughter (well, she is a bit hefty), they convince her the remark was certainly made toward the 5'10" 135 lb. tan model on the red scooter. Suddenly, however, Mom and Dad aren't so convinced that A&M is the place for baby Sal' to go. We (A&M students) get a bad reputation because you goofed.

My tradition suffers; I don't "whoop," nor do I particularly get a thrill out of standing for a whole football game. I do know, though, how easy it is for a few individuals to negatively influence the reputation of almost any institution. Right now, I'm part of this one.

Mark Figart '90

Break tradition

EDITOR:

Spring has come to Bryan-College Station, and love is in the air. In these next few months, as in years past, many Aggies will fall in love, become engaged and get married. Many gentlemen will display their devotion to their ladies through the gift of a glittering diamond ring, which is a lovely token of affection. But do not be misled by the diamond's charms — for all its surface dazzle, the diamond is cruel at heart.

The overwhelming majority of diamonds bought and sold in America come from the mines of the most ungodly nations in the world: South Africa. South Africa is a country where the black majority cannot even vote for change. Black workers labor under miserable conditions for small wages, while the white minority sells the diamonds for their own enrichment and to fund the continuation of their oppressive system.

Marriage is perhaps the oldest tradition in the world, and to many of us the diamond engagement ring seems an essential part of that tradition. But, please, think a bit more before you buy that diamond. Wouldn't another stone be just as beautiful and meaningful? And wouldn't you feel better about yourself?

Shoshana Kaminsky, visitor to campus

Letters to the editor should not exceed 300 words in length. The editorial staff reserves the right to edit letters for style and length, but will make every effort to maintain the author's intent. Each letter must be signed and must include the author's name, address and telephone number of the writer.

The Battalion

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Editorial Policy

The Battalion is a non-profit, self-supporting newspaper operated as a community service to Texas A&M and Bryan-College Station.

Opinions expressed in *The Battalion* are those of the editorial board or the author, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Texas A&M administrators, faculty or the Board of Regents.

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