

Remember when . . .

A brief history of A&M's student newspaper

by DeRenda McGee

In 1878, only two years after Texas A&M opened its doors, the *Texas Collegian* was born. This newspaper was the father of today's *Battalion*, Vicky Lindley said in her 1948 booklet, "*The Battalion: Seventy Years of Student Publications at the A&M College of Texas.*"

campus announcements, was printed in Bryan because A&M had no printing press. It was first printed by the *Brazos Weekly Pilot* and later by the *Bryan Eagle*, she said.

The paper was published monthly by the Stephen F. Austin and Calliopean Literary Societies that were, at the time, the most important organizations on campus.

The *Collegian*, used primarily for local news and Lindley said four out of every five students were members of these clubs.

Most copies of the *Collegian* are lost, but a few can be found in the University Archives.

"The copies we have (in the Archives) are the only copies I know of existing," University Archivist Charles Schultz said.

"The files of Texas A&M's publications were lost in the Old Main fire in 1911, and the copies of the *Collegian* were burned with it."

In 1889, the *Texas Collegian* became the *College Journal* which was also published monthly, Lindley said. It had a magazine format and was slightly larger than a Reader's Digest.

"It had a lavishly ornamented cover page, which was the style in those Victorian days," she said. "The two biggest stories carried by the *College Journal* were Sul Ross's acceptance of A&M's presidency and the elaborate memorial services conducted in the college chapel when Jefferson Davis died.

"Davis had been asked to be A&M's first president but he declined due to poor health."

The first *Battalion* was presented to Lawrence Sullivan Ross in October, 1893.

"It was more like a magazine than a newspaper," Lindley said. "The first issue was about one-fourth the size of today's *Batt* and it had only 12 pages."

The *Battalion* soon returned to the old *Journal* style and size, says Lindley. It was published in pocket-size until 1904.

The *Battalion's* first editorials were more domestic than today's.

"In the first issue of *The Battalion*, Editor E.L. Bruce wrote: 'This thing of wading through water on rainy nights cannot last long,' and suggested better campus drainage and better street lighting," Lindley said.

Another editorial complained that prices at the campus store were so high, it was worth the 30 cent round trip fare to go to Bryan for supplies.

One letter to the editor suggested there was too much outside reading in the English department. Another, in 1894, read: "Football at A&MC is

surely the coming game. Two years ago comparatively no interest was manifested in the scrappy game at all."

By 1902, reports of every football game were found in its two fall issues.

Alumni also had a hand in *The Battalion*, Lindley says.

"Alumni editors used the *Batt* to keep former students in touch with each other until the *Alumni Quarterly* was founded in 1915. It became the *Texas Aggie* in 1921," she said.

The Long Horn (the name given to A&M's first yearbook) and the *Texas Aggie* claim *The Battalion* as predecessor, Lindley says.

"Instead of a college yearbook, Aggies received June commencement issues of the *Batt*," she said. "It contained many pictures and articles usually found in annuals. In fact, the *Batt's* first pictures were in the June 1893 commencement issue."

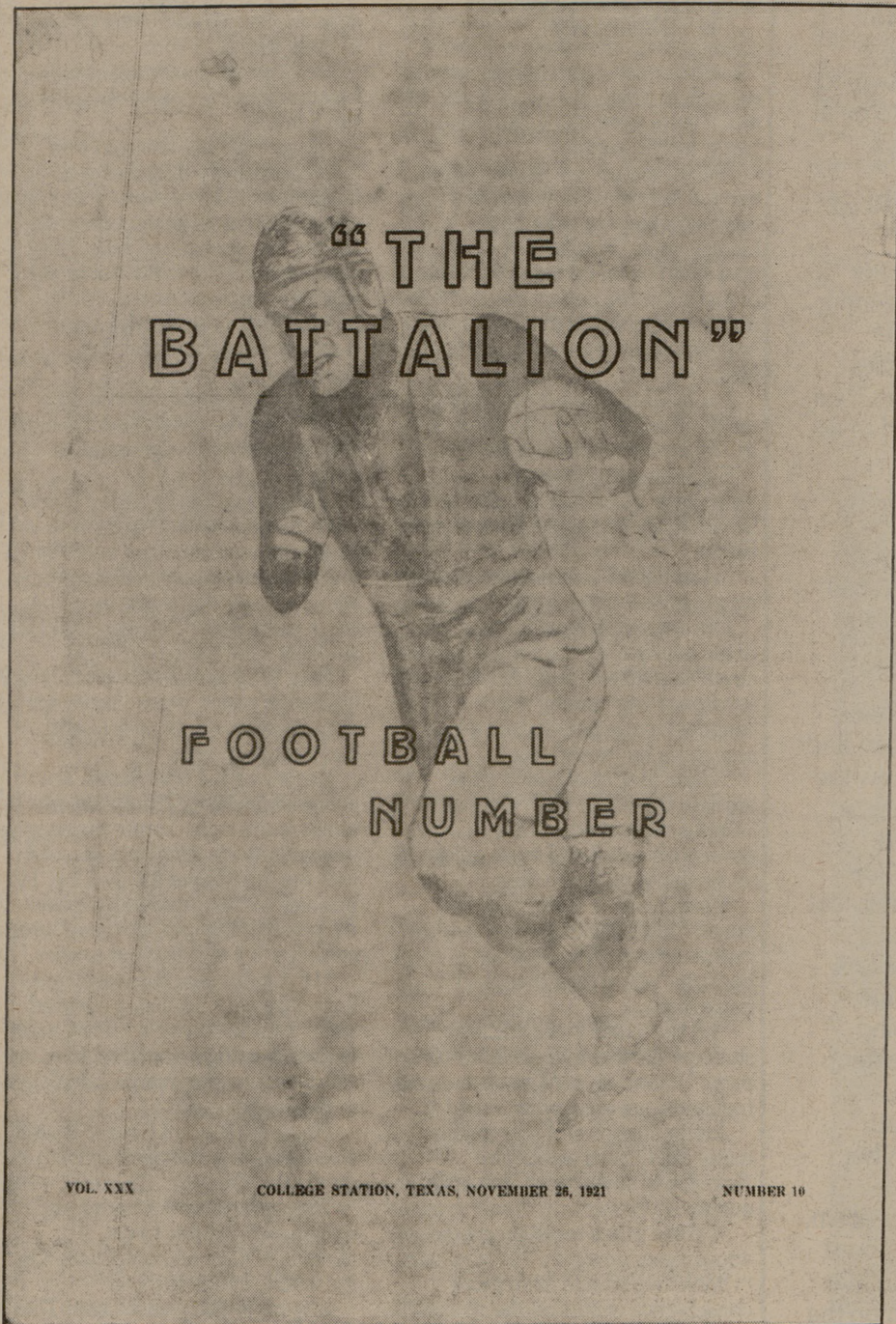
The *Battalion* became a weekly newspaper in 1904 when publication was given to the Association of Students due to decreasing influence and prestige in the Austin and Calliopean Literary Societies in the early 1900's, Lindley said.

The newspaper, with its renewed prestige, got its first office in 1907, Lindley said.

"The office, which was shared with the Long Horn, had one table, one desk and a telephone," she explained.

In 1908, scandal rocked *The Battalion* when seven juniors were suspended from school for writing an editorial criticizing A&M President Harrington, Lindley said. The head of the English department was ordered to censor future issues of *The Battalion* but the order was never enforced.

The *Battalion* boasted "the largest college circulation in the South" in 1916 with 20 people on staff including two women who were "society reporters," Lindley said. However, during World War I, *The Battalion*,



This early *Battalion* is dated Nov. 26, 1921.