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The History of Scarlet and Cream

How the University Colors Were Adopted, and Why

Scarlet and Cream not the Original University Colors.

The majority of the students of the University are probably of the opinion that scarlet and cream have been the colors of the University for a great many years. Our colors mean so much, and have for so many years been associated in our minds with the U. of N., that we are inclined to infer that they were adopted when the University was founded. Graduates who completed the prescribed course of study years ago were, in some instances, of the opinion that our colors were adopted in the early history of the University. Investigation, however, shows that such was not the case, and that scarlet and cream are of comparatively recent origin.

Demand for Colors First Appears in 1882.

It has been twenty-one years since our predecessors decided to adopt a color that would distinguish the University from neighboring institutions, and afford the students an opportunity to display their loyalty. During the early eighties the University was competing with Doane College in various contests, and the question of having a college color naturally arose. College spirit (concerning which we have heard so much of late), was at that early period manifested to some extent, and these contests with Doane acted as a proper stimulus. The students readily appreciated the necessity for a college color.

Old Gold the Earliest U. of N. Color.

Clem Chase, who was then "local editor" of the Hesperian, seems to have been an important factor in the selection of, not "scarlet and cream," but, "old gold." "Old gold" was adopted by general consent, and from that time on we have not been without our colors. The Hesperian of April 15, 1882, in an editorial makes the following comment concerning the inauguration of the colors:

"'Old gold' seems to have become the accepted color of this State University and will figure hereafter conspicuously at all our entertainments. To have some mark, some color like this that we can recognize gives us esprit; we can 'follow our colors,' and old gold is certainly a pretty one and in some senses symbolical. Is not Nebraska one of the western states where the sunsets are always in old gold? Do not our broad wheat fields show wave on wave of old gold? Here, then, for our college color, and may we never dishonor it."

* *

In honor of "the accepted colors" the cover of volume one of the Sombrero, which came out in the spring of 1884, was in old gold, and from 1882 until the close of 1893 old gold figured "conspicuously at all our entertainments" and games. In the Hesperian "write up" of the 1891 Thanksgiving game with Iowa, which was played in Omaha and resulted in Nebraska's defeat to the tune of 22 to 0, we find mention of the loyal manner in which former students wore their colors. The account says:

"The Uni delegation is indebted to Mr. Hayden . . . for a liberal discount on horns, eye-glasses, ribbons, and gold cloth. . . . He presented us with all the gold cloth he had in stock and kindly offered room in his store for our headquarters."

Old Gold Discovered to be Older Color of Rival Institution.

But the reign of "old gold" was soon to come to a close. Everything went along very smoothly until it was discovered that our old rival, Iowa, had the same color, and then trouble began. How was Nebraska to be distinguished from Iowa? It would never do for these institutions to have the same color. Iowa had adopted "old gold" before Nebraska had, and the only thing left for the latter to do was to adopt a new color, or new colors. Agitation had been going on for some time, and at the close of the football season of '93 it was decided to take some definite action. Chancellor Canfield, who always took a great interest in all matters pertaining to the University, was one of the leading factors in this movement.

Scarlet and Cream Adopted in 1893 and Still Cherished.

An enthusiastic mass meeting was held, and after several spirited speeches had been made a committee was appointed. This committee, of which Mr. Ralph E. Johnson of this city was a leading member, selected "scarlet and cream." As a result the Hesperian for December 1, 1893, came out in scarlet and cream covers. The Quarto-Centennial (1895) number of the Sombrero was also bound in a beautiful scarlet and cream cover, and our colors have certainly figured "conspicuously" at all college affairs since. The consensus of opinion among students and members of the faculty is very favorable to scarlet and cream as appropriate colors for our University. Among the other institutions which have the same colors are Boston University, Dickinson College, the University of Alabama, the University of Indiana and Western Reserve University.

An Ode to the Theme Man.

It seems that I cannot escape the theme man's persecutions. I am sure I don't owe him that theme for December first; but since he insists, here goes. The alcoves are as quiet as catacombs tonight, with all the dead books of long ago a-stare in the weak light, and hollow footsteps in the far corners. It would be a relief to see Wyer descend upon some loving couple or catch the glare of Payne's fervid poll upon the far horizon. But there is only the monotonous scratching of crypt and the cold silence of the ranged shelves. One might as well try to be literary in the embrace of a cold bath. My soul is frozen up stiff and refuses to work—yet I have evolved a page of ink—a tribute surely to my wordy genius.

M. S.

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