



Centennial reflection reveals familiar traits and habits

Cut off, I pray, those ringlets fair, Of long, uncombed pneumatic hair. Dress up your heads and then begin to cultivate the brains within.

Hesperian Nov. 25, 1894 by Jim Pedersen Nebraskan Staff Writer

"Anyone wearing their hair over their ears or down on their neck should be forced to cut it off or go to jail. The world has had enough to make it sad without this blooming array of unkempt intellectuality that tends to provoke riot and bloodshed."

The student of 1969 would probably attribute these words to Mayor Daley, George Wallace or maybe even his own parents. But this outburst came from the University of Nebraska publication, the Hesperian, in 1894 in reaction to the manner in which the football players wore their hair in the 1890's.

THE SIZE of the University has changed. So has its physical structure. But many of the interests, motivations and attitudes of the students are the same in both eras.

In 1892 the school could not get enough men out for football to even scrimmage. The team considered dispensing with the coach because they couldn't afford to pay him. The biggest blow to the school's pride, however, was when small Doane College defeated the team.

A cry went up that the University needed a good football team to prove to the world that it was more than a one horse Normal School. By 1896 it was a power in the Midwest. Enthusiasm ran so high that football, to the dismay of several faculty members, eclipsed debating in importance.

STUDENTS OF the 1890's, like students of today, often met with their professors outside the classroom for informal discussions. But the circumstances were somewhat different.

Unlike today's professor who invites

his students to his home for a discussion over a bottle of beer, professors then invited their students to come to the historical room for apples and popcorn.

The Gay '90's, which produced the beer garden and the Chicago World's Fair, did not really affect the social life of a young university in a small prairie town. Nevertheless, socializing was important.

A PARTY, noted in the Hesperian as a great success, was held in a rented house in Lincoln where "dancing and games were indulged in till a late hour." Refreshments were hot wieners.

Students of the day were expected to retain material in their heads, not write it down. Students who carried notebooks were frowned on as nuisances who illustrated systemized ignorance.

The administration was seldom the target of student protest. It probably escaped unfavorable notice because it was small and most authority over students lay in the hands of the faculty.

IN 1896, however, students protested against a five cent charge for the use of baths in the gymnasium by presenting a petition to the chancellor's office. The petition also charged that students were being discriminated against in the use of the baths.

Apparently everybody hated the charge and thought they were the subject of discrimination. The petition was signed by 600 male students, virtually the entire male enrollment.

The center of the University's social and intellectual life rested in the three literary societies.

They were the Palladian, the Delian and Union societies.

THESE SOCIETIES were actually fraternities with an intellectual purpose. They limited their membership to about eighty members each and provided social functions. Oratory contests were considered both the social and intellectual high points of each term.

The Chase and Wheeler Oratory

Contest, presented by the oldest of the societies, the Palladians, was attended by a large number of students and it was considered a great honor to participate in the contest.

The contests were held indoors in an atmosphere similar to a 20th century basketball game.

USUALLY REPRESENTATIVES from at least four schools participated. Groups of students would gather in rooting sections and sing, wave banners and give cheers for their school. Each oration was separated by some form of music ranging from a vocal solo to the Lansing orchestra.

The location for these contests and nearly all other activity at the University was the Chapel. Located in the main building - University Hall - the Chapel was the hub of the University.

All the literary societies frequently held meetings there, as did the three political clubs, the Democrats, Republicans and Independents. In addition, the Chapel was used for daily worship services which all students were expected to attend. Faculty were excluded.

BESIDES presenting oratory contests, the main purpose of the literary societies seemed to be preventing the organization of fraternities and sororities.

There were only five Greek letter organizations on campus in 1892, three fraternities and two sororities, hardly constituting the term "Greek system." Yet by 1899 there were 12 fraternities and five sororities.

The literary societies claimed themselves as examples of true brotherhood, providing a place for the awkward country boy and the timid city youth. They were open to male and female, white and black, poor and rich, cultured and uncultured. Meetings were not held in secrecy and social events were open to all.

IN STRIKING contrast, fraternities of the day were primarily interested in wealthy students. Meetings were held in secret which led the

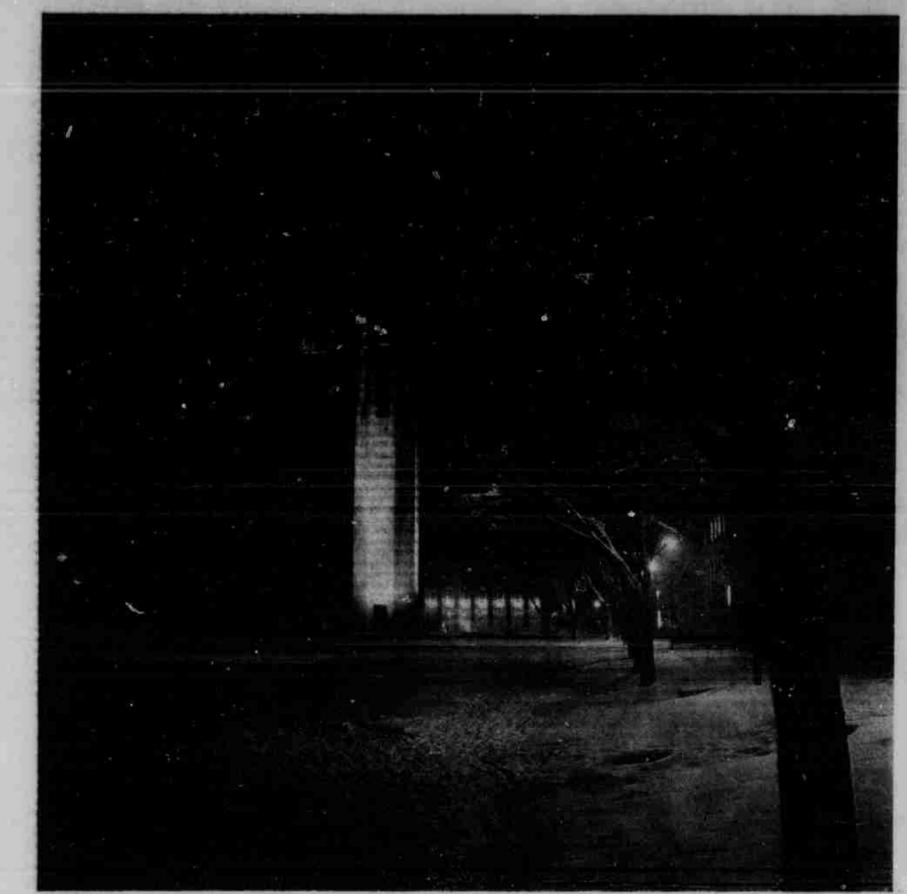


PHOTO BY DICK RUPNABER

"Hesperian" to call them "apathetic, silent, indifferent organizations."

Probably a better reason for the animosity which existed between the two groups was the fierce competition in which they engaged.

The infant fraternities and the literary societies annually sought to fill their memberships from the incoming freshman class. In effect, they rushed against each other. Each were quick to point to any of their members who were in the political clubs, on the football team or on the staff of the "Hesperian."

WILLA CATHER, famous Nebraska author, was a student of this era and literary editor of the "Hesperian." She frequently wrote satirical and sharp criticisms of the sorority girls.

She characterized them as jealous, conceited, character assassins interested in a girl only if her membership in the sorority would enhance the reputation of the house.

The battle of the "frats" and the "barbs" raged on through the '90s. In spite of the natural inhibition which faced the fraternities in the form of proud class spirit, the Greek houses prevailed and grew.

BY THE LATE 1900's the literary societies, limited by their local structure, were declining. The Greek houses, on the other hand, were influenced by national organization and began to thrive.

Many of the customs involving class rivalry which marked the 1890's are neither present nor typical in today's University. One such custom was the cane rush between the "freshies" and the sophomores.

The members of each class would line up opposite of each other and then rush for a wooden cane placed in the center of an open area. Whichever class escaped with the cane during the melee would prove its superiority. Girls took part in the scramble also.

ON ONE such occasion in 1894, the freshman class invaded Chapel services one day armed with canes and routed the sophomores outside.

The result of the cane battle was a long list of injuries including a skull fracture and several internal hurts.

The classroom was characterized by frequent problems of discipline over unruly students. Classes also required a fairly standard mode of dress.

One issue of the Hesperian noted that the senior class would be willing to pay the laundry bills of poor boys that are forced to wear sweaters to class instead of civilized shirts.

VACATIONS WERE practically nonexistent for the student of the 1890's. Although students claimed they were overworked and needed at least a week of vacation in April to rest up for the hardest part of the year, the spring term, for which they were granted only two days.

If the students were overworked, so were the professors. When a modern language department was created in 1895, the three professors in the department were forced to teach a total of 60 credit hours.

In class, the students sat in backless recitation chairs which were apparently quite old by 1893 when the Hesperian claimed the chairs were causing students to assume a posture in which the right shoulder was higher than the left.

A year later in a burst of wild excitement over a football win at Kansas University, the students decided to celebrate by smashing the ancient chairs. They rushed onto the University lawn and continued to throw the chairs into the air until all were broken.

THE SOCIAL TONE of the University is probably best reflected by an editorial in the "Hesperian" which commends the students at Northwestern University for upholding the four-mile rule - a rule which stated that no liquor establishment could be built within four miles of the campus.

Parties involving students were simple. Hot and cold soda was popular at Rhector's Pharmacy. Ice skating and card parties were considered proper social events.

An example of what was considered social news can be found in one issue

of the campus paper which said simply, "Frank Brown went home to attend the wedding of his brother and enjoy a good dinner."

THE CHANCELLOR, although he was generally spared the criticism aimed at today's administrators, did not escape attack altogether. One Hesperian blasted Chancellor Canfield, not for suppressing academic freedom, but for being opposed to football.

Another editorial advocated what must have been an early form of student power on the University campus. The editorial called for full student control of a committee, then composed entirely of faculty members, which determined the subject matter of certain lectures.

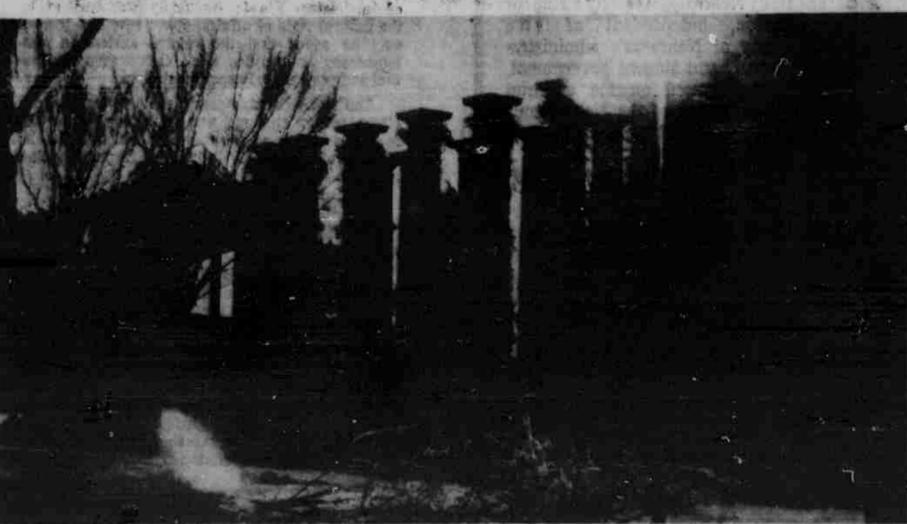
The early years of the University were marked by classes of recitation alone. There were no lectures, no research, no questions. Laboratories were unheard of.

BY THE 1890's the University had evolved into an institution which encouraged the student to think, to investigate, to find out facts and principles himself. Life at the University was thought to be the proper, normal beginning of life-long intellectual activity.

It was in the '90's that the graduate college appeared, and the University was organized into distinct departments. Specialization early in the college curriculum of the student became more and more common.

Many students and some faculty opposed this movement. "There is nothing like a broad background on which to build a later specialty. A building without a firm foundation will never be a skyscraper," wrote one staff member from the Hesperian.

MUCH OF THE SPIRIT, the rivalry, and even the mild protest which have characterized the University of Nebraska in the 1960's is evident in the University of the 1890's. Although many of the customs, fads, and conventions of the students of that era have disappeared, the student of the University has not really changed much.



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LAST BASKET BALL

BASKETBALL TEAM RETURNS FROM TRIP. Interest of University Fans was Centered in the Semi-Finals Under Trunk Meet.

The University basketball squad returned today from their annual trip to the north and east. The success which the team had enjoyed during the season was the cause of the excitement for a successful trip, but necessary to separate the trip from very different. Of the eight games played the Cornhuskers were able to win only one.

Although most of the details are detailed, it is interesting to note that the team which was considered the best of the season, the Cornell team, was defeated by the University team.

First, the team began the trip in a wretched condition. Several who had been one of the members of the team, did not leave with the team as they had to find it possible to join them at New York, for the last two games as it was hoped to be. Despite this, the team did not leave before leaving with the team and throughout the season.

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By the time the team returned to the campus, the Cornell team had been defeated by the University team.

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WILLIAM J. BRYAN

Peace Program at Chapel Today and Hon. W. J. Bryan, Professor of Law, will preside with Henry and J. M. Bessons in Address by Prof. Geo. E. Howard upon special topics.

Next Y. M. C. A. Supper. Palladian Play. To Be Held at St. Paul's Church Next Saturday Night.

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THE THIRD LECTURE

PROF. POWERS FINISHES SERIES LAST SATURDAY NIGHT. Discusses Tomb of Pope Julius, the Secrecy in Florence and the Last Judgment.

A large audience listened to the last lecture of Professor Powers in the Temple Theater Saturday evening. His last lecture dealt mainly with the tomb of Pope Julius, the Secrecy in Florence and the Last Judgment. The following is a brief summary of the lecture.

The tomb of Pope Julius was the focus of Michelangelo's life and an earthly world has been the masterpiece of the world had to be able to finish it according to his original design. When Pope Julius gave him the commission he was feverishly to work and in eight months had eight or ten statues finished, although very few of them would be an ordinary year's work. It was found that St. Peter's was too small for the tomb, so it was torn down and the present edifice was started, but the remains of Michelangelo's tomb were placed in the center of the open area.

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"Peace Program at Chapel today honoring William Jennings Bryan . . ." DAILY NEBRASKAN, Tuesday, March 10, 1908.