

98 Years of 'Pomp a

Graduation History

It's supposed to be only death and taxes that always have been and always will be, but the graduation ceremony may be a candidate for that list.

But while the 1040 income tax form may get longer, shorter, harder or easier to complete, the format for UNL's graduation ceremonies essentially has stayed the same throughout the years, said Shirley Thomsen, assistant director of registration and records.

From the first recorded ceremony on June 10, 1886, in which 11 students received their diplomas, to 1964, graduation ceremonies took place in various auditoriums in downtown Lincoln, including St. Paul's Methodist Church at 12th and M streets, Thomsen said. Photographs from University Archives, dating from the 1920s to the 60s, show the ceremonies being conducted in the Coliseum. There, speakers delivered their words of wisdom from the stage to the grads on the basketball court as parents and relatives looked on from the bleachers.

Other photos show the Coliseum decorated with white sheetlike tapestries hanging from the ceiling. The cloths, covered with steel girder framework in an attempt to give the gym an air of elegance.

During the time the Coliseum was used, Thomson said, "when there weren't so many buildings around," the graduates assembled outside on midcampus and marched in line to commencement.

Between 1964 and 1974, the ceremonies took place at Pershing Auditorium, 226 Centennial Mall

South. Because of the larger number of graduates, Thomsen said, two graduations had to be scheduled, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Graduation returned to the Coliseum in 1975 to await the completion of the Bob Devaney Sports Center. The ceremonies have been scheduled there since 1976.

Graduates used to pick up their diplomas in the track area of the sports center instead of actually walking across the stage to receive their certificate as they do now, Thomsen said. Another change in the ceremony has been in the number of graduates.

Thomsen said that, because of the number of colleges that have come and gone from the university, the figures in her records are deceiving. However, even in 1930, when 818 graduated, the Arts and Sciences and Teachers colleges had the largest number of graduates. This trend held true for the 984 graduates in the class of 1960, Thomsen said, and will continue for the 2,000-member class of 1984.

Thomsen said she has noticed changes in students' attitudes during her 33 years of checking students' credentials, notifying them of their graduation requirements and sending them ceremony instructions. Students, especially during the 1960s and 1970s, were more rebellious than they are now, she said. Not many students attended graduation and when they did, they often wore armbands or sometimes became "physically abusive," she said.

These days, Thomsen said, "students are very serious about attending commencement and picking up their diplomas."



Graduation 1960s



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