

Conflicts Incite Strikes, Pranks

Johnstown Flood Caused One Class Suspension

By DON BARLETT

Conflicts between students and faculty during the 100-year history of the University have incited both strikes and pranks.

The first student strike was in 1892. C. H. "Calamity" Musser had gone home for a vacation but had failed to return to school on time using as his excuse the famous Johnstown Flood. The faculty, however, was not aware of the seriousness of the flood and refused to believe his story. The faculty then proceeded to suspend Musser.

The class of '92, of which Musser was a member, backed him up by skipping an examination and playing a baseball game instead.

For this act of insubordination the entire class was suspended, whereupon the class marched to the field near the University Inn and pitched tents. The encampment was called "Camp Suspension."

The students remained there for several days, until the faculty, realizing the truth of the flood story, reinstated the class.

Out of this situation came the following poem by W. W. Taylor, '92.

Ode of '92

*We are watching, we are waiting
for the faculty to act.
When the shingles, hickory
shingles,
on our backs will come
"ger-whack."*

Chorus:

*Lo he comes! See, the Prez draws
near.
Freshmen, shout your end is
here.*

*We are watching, we are waiting
for that bright and
glorious day,
When the Freshman for suspen-
sion to his home shall go
away.*

*We are watching, we are waiting,
for the mail bag to appear,
When with Orders, Money Orders,
We will settle all bills here.*

During this time there were many other petty regulations

which caused unrest and led to student pranks.

One night students carried unhusked corn into a recitation room and brought in pigs. One can imagine the state of things the following morning.

At this time students were required to attend chapel. One day during the service a skeleton slowly descended from the gallery above and was brought to rest above the speaker's head. The laughter of the audience called it to the speaker's attention.

Tooth Causes Trouble

A more serious story is told as the result of strict regulations. A young man of fine character and who had no bad record, developed a severe toothache one day. He went to the nearest dentist, located more than 12 miles away. The dentist kept him so long that he missed one or more recitations. When he returned he reported at once what had happened.

He was, however, suspended for having broken a rule, the penalty for which was suspension. There was a strike by the students when they heard of the incident. They sent a communication to the faculty asking for the reinstatement of the student and for modifications of some of the rules.

The faculty obliged by changing some of the rules but it refused to reinstate the student. The man in question was "mature, studious and dependable and well regarded by all." Under the cir-

cumstances he refused to return to the University at the end of his suspension period. He went on to become a leading citizen of his county and was later elected to a responsible position.

Thus, through the petty rules of the college, an "influential alumnus" and a man of "high ethical and intellectual attainments" was lost.

Chemistry Causes Explosion

In 1897, after students had received their chemistry grades from Dr. Pond, most of which were failures, the cannon in front of Old Main was set off. Every window in Old Main from the third floor down was broken and all the windows in the chemistry building were broken. When the students had registered they were required to pay a damage fee to cover farmer's claims for stolen cows, etc. Since the students wouldn't get any money back anyhow, the thought of destruction was stimulated.

In the fall of 1905 the most serious disagreement between students and faculty occurred. The cause of the strike was attributed directly to the feeling that the rules on cutting were too strict.

Military Salute Required

Other factors which contributed to the "great strike" were the claims by students that professors were so tied up in business interests and speculation, that their classes suffered; and the fact that President Atherton desired a military salute from all students.

These two strikes in 1892 and 1905 have been the most serious disputes between students and faculty in the University's 100-year history.

However, many pranks were instigated because of students' feelings toward professors and rules of the University.

Prof Jokes; Bell Rings

One professor continually irritated his students by joking in his lectures. One day when the professor was giving a talk, every time he cracked a joke a bell would ring. It was difficult to tell where the bell was but it was synchronized with the professor's jokes. Afterwards it was discovered that two nails had been driven into the floor and were connected by wires to an electric bell. The nails were so placed that a student with an iron plate on his heel could ring the bell. The wir-

ing was done so cleverly that it was quite some time after the occurrence of the bell-ringing that it was discovered.

Mock Funerals

Another slur directed towards professors occurred when a row of wooden plaques painted white were buried in the ground in front of Old Main to represent tombstones. Each plaque bore the name of an unpopular professor. The implication being: "They were dead; now they are buried."

As early as 1865 students were playing pranks. In a letter from Tellico Johnson, class of 1865, the following story was revealed: "Our dining room was a broad shanty extending westerly from the south part of the Main Building (Old Main), and the students sat at long tables extending the length of the dining room, with a professor at the head of each table.

The Butter Incident

"We had grace at each table and I sat at a table presided over by professor Wilson. During grace I peeked and saw professor Wilson with wide open eyes looking at me and saying grace as usual. I ducked down and after dinner I asked a student why he kept his eyes open. He told me professor Wilson used to close them during grace but a rough fellow threw a pat of butter at him, hitting him in the face and he never said grace after that with closed eyes."

One student prank which has

gone down in history and which made the headlines of the newspapers including the Police Gazette, occurred when a group of students sent to Pine Grove Mills to attend a singing school and took along with them the ingredients for making hydrogen sulfide. The chemical which started generating in the middle of the service broke up the meeting and the boys made news.

A recent student demonstration occurred in April, 1949. The demonstration was led by a group of Nittany-Pollock men who staged a food protest. The unorganized demonstration followed the pattern of a similar demonstration at East Stroudsburg State Teachers College the previous year.

The 'Panty Raid'

The demonstration which drew the most adverse publicity for the University was a "panty raid" which took place on April 7, 1952.

Between 2000 and 3000 men participated in the riot which started in Thompson Hall. After an unsuccessful attempt to raid Thompson, the students moved to McAllister Hall. There the men poured into the dormitory through the open front doors and up the fire escapes. The men met no resistance from the coeds.

At one point in the raid, coeds were chanting "go, go, go, go," as the men advanced on the dorm.

However, only one great strike has marred the University's 100-year history: the strike of 1905.

For continuous leadership in all fields of education and development of the youth for the succeeding generations, we wish you perennial success in the future.

Ray's Ranch



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