Legend, history merge in rites 1212

15 members each, and the Sphinx, an upperclassmen's

society, withered away.

"With the incredible boom growth of the '60s when the student population of this place just took off, I think a lot of these groups just lost their influence and attraction," said Roger Williams, a University alumnus and now vice

president for University relations. A student who joined Skull and Bones last week said it remains secret today because many members think the secrecy is part of the "charm" of belonging.

The groups still attract the leaders of the student governing bodies. Skull and Bones is considered more prestigious than Parmi Nous because it concentrates on the traditional student leaders while Parmi Nous includes

athletes, members of both groups said. Parmi Nous also still publishes its group photo in La Vie at the end of each year, but during the year the mem-

bership list is confidential. "It's an honor society that says your peers recognize your service to the University," said Mary Pickens, a Skull and Bones member and the president of the Panhellenic Council.

It starts with a tap

A person is tapped by other members of the organization about two weeks before initiation night. Several sources recently tapped said the bid came in an unsigned letter placed among the person's belongings.

The letter invites the person to join a secret honor. society, with the condition that he or she can belong to just one of the societies. If the person accepts, he or she must get to know other tappees to prepare for initiation.

For Skull and Bones, the initiation ceremony revolves around instilling the core idea that "false pride" is rmann. detrimental, because leaders who becomes too wrapped up in their achievements will become ineffective.

'It deals with saying to the student leader that 'yes, you've done a lot but now you go back to the bottom of the ladder, don't get too proud,' " said Landis.

The tappees are put through a series of unusual activities on initiation night that some called degrading, although some older members said the ceremony isn't as bad as it used to be.

"When I went through initiation they put me through a lot of shit," said a professor who became an honorary member several years ago. "It was a lot of things that basically were degrading.'

The professor, who attended last week's initiation, said the ceremony then included crawling through mud and drinking at downtown bars. But the initiation ceremony. has been cleaned up a great deal within the last few years,

the professor added. Landis said he considered some past rituals to have included hazing, but wouldn't say how long ago that was. He added that much of the degrading nature was eliminated for last week's ceremony.

'My position is that if I would ever encounter a group that hazes I would not put up with it and I would do something," said Pickens. Asked if she encountered hazing when she was initiated into Skull and Bones last spring, she said, "I don't think that's important."

The secret rituals

last April described the initiation:

The pledges gathered at Shields Building at dusk and campus issues. were met by Skull and Bones members blue sweatshirts emblazoned with the large skull-and-

The source said they were put through a series of drills. "They called us maggots, they screamed at us coming right up to your face like at army boot camp."

The pledges had to get down on the concrete and "wallow like a worm." From Shields the pledges ran to the Nittany Lion Shrine, where they were met by the older faculty and administrative honorary members, such as Arthur Goldschmidt, associate professor of history, and Thomas Eakin, director of student services.

Pickens confirmed that "wallowing" used to be part of the ceremony but would not say when it was removed. At the shrine, where more Skull and Bones members waited, the group sang songs and were taught to remain united as pledge members. Last Wednesday night a Collegian reporter observed this part of the ceremony, a ceremony that included, among others, the initiations of USG President Matt Baker, USG Vice President Sue

Sturgis and Black Caucus President Darryl King. The ritual next moved to the University House, where members blindfolded the pledges and led them in circles with ropes around their necks. Then, still blindfolded, the pledges were taken by car to a wooded area — rumored to

be near Port Matilda -- for the last part of the ceremony. The legend behind Skull and Bones, is based on the following: Two brothers, student leaders, lived in the Nittany Valley. One was humble, the other vain and conceited. They went hunting with a group of other student leaders, and the vain brother broke off from the rest and went out on his own. Some time later, the humble brother stumbled across his brother's skull and bones at

the spot where he had been killed in a hunting accident. Each pledge class is taken to that area, where the pledges toss bleached bones — signed by current Skull and Bones members — onto the spot where the student leader who had too much pride died.

The signing of the bones, usually beef bones, is a preinitiation rite that allows the members to meet the pledges, a source said.

Membership at the top

Jordan, who became an honorary member soon after he arrived as president in 1983, is one of the signers, said two recent tappees and his executive assistant, Carol Her-

Landis said all honorary members are subject to the same ceremonial initiation rites as other members. Speaking for Jordan, Herrmann said the president has had no contact with Skull and Bones except when he was

initiated and when he signs the bones of pledges. She said Jordan didn't participate in the initiation ceremonies and had no knowledge of hazing involved with

the ceremony. One source said, however, that when Jordan met with new tappees to sign their bones, he reminded them that everything happened for a purpose. The source said that at the Shields initiation pledges were told that indeed every member, including Jordan, went through the rite.

After initiation night, much of the group's activities concern informal socializing, usually at downtown bars. Members aren't allowed to wear their sweatshirts or hats around campus, as they did in the old days. And they aren't allowed to disclose the names of other members.

"I decided to join after I found out about it," said the student leader who joined Skull and Bones last week. "It gives me a chance to meet other people who are having the same problems I have. It's a support group.'

"I'm not to sure of the influence of Skull and Bones on matters of policies," said last year's USG president, David Rosenblatt, who was not tapped to join either secret honor society.

"They seem to be just an ego-inflating group that goes around drinking a lot," he said. Rosenblatt said that even though he wasn't a member, he didn't believe the group affected his administration.

One person who went through Skull and Bones initiation. But he said the possibility exists that members may trade information and make decisions made about key

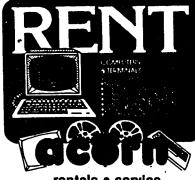
Members denied that happens, saying the group is more of a social organization

"I don't go in there as 'Hi, my name's Mary Panhel President,'" Pickens said. "There's nothing subversive about it.

If information about issues is discussed between two people, it's with the understanding that it won't go any further, Pickens said.

"The purpose is not to fix positions on issues. The purpose is to recognize your contribution to Penn State," she added.

Tomorrow: a look at Lion's Paw.



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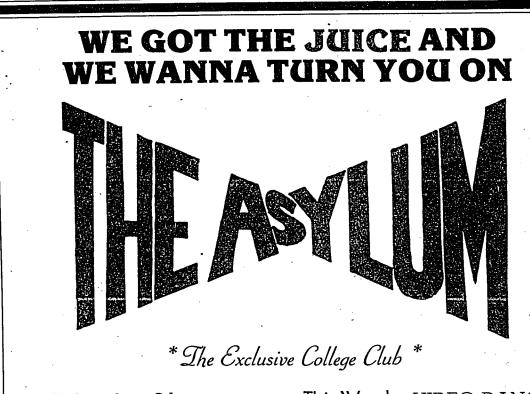
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