

Stormy history told of 'O' on Butte

By SUE GOODNIGHT
Emerald Staff Writer

On May 11, 1908, the campus newspaper (then called the "Oregon Weekly") announced that among other construction projects scheduled for the first Junior Weekend, a huge cement "O" was to be built on Skinner's Butte, a small hill just north of Willamette St. The monogram was sponsored by the Eugene Commercial Club and on May 22 the block letter was built by the University men.

A great event

The establishment of the "O" on the Butte marked an event that would figure prominently in the future traditions of the school. The traditional painting of the letter was established on the fifth annual "University Day" when junior men gathered to apply the first coat of lemon yellow. The juniors continued to paint it until 1912 when the class of 1913 decided it was too messy of a job and handed the dubious honor to the freshman men. Each frosh class painted the "O" under junior supervision until 1922 when only frosh lettermen were elected. Three years later the letterman's club, the "Order of the O," took over the job of supervision.

Although Oregon's sister school, Oregon State College, is the one that usually causes friction over the "O," a visiting California baseball team in 1910 were the first to tamper with the landmark. They blocked out one side of the "O," thus transforming it into the California "C." Not to be outdone by a California college, the Beavers of OSC arrived unnoticed in 1911 and covered Oregon's pride with several coats of very sticky tar. The following year brought a change in the method of painting with the introduction of the "human paintbrush," a method still used today.

In the second week of November, 1929, the town of Eugene was jolted by a violent 3 a.m. explosion. The lower right-hand corner of the "O"—one of the few large-sized pieces remaining after the blast—came to rest on the floor of a building near the base of the Butte after entering through the roof. The men from OAC were naturally suspected although there was no proof. And, on Nov.

13, the Oregon State Memorial Union was found smeared with paint, perhaps, it was thought, in retaliation for the damage to the "O."

A period of relative calm followed save for a few applications of orange paint and tar. Then, in 1937, the peace was shattered in an OSC raid on Oregon that was later called the "Great War." Over 1,500 Beavers invaded the Oregon campus three days after winning the annual Webfoot-Beaver game. Ducks poured from classrooms to defend their alma mater and hand-to-hand combat broke out. Oregon was successful in beating off the attack and, with a few Beaver captives, gained one of their infrequent revenges—having the "O" painted with OSC bottoms!

Beaver stolen

The war years brought peace to the campus except for occasional OSC strikes. In November of 1943, Oregon struck back. The OSC mascot mysteriously disappeared and immediately Oregon was blamed. The Beavers came down to the U. of O. campus searching for their little beaver, but failed to locate him. It was during their search that the "O" was again changed to a brilliant orange.

Several blastings of the battered "O" followed the "kidnapped beaver" incident, but the end came on May 15, 1953 when the "O" was blown up for the last time. It had been repaired the week before from a "C" (for cow college) and was in the form of an upside-down "U." Naturally OSC was suspected, but no proof was available.

A proposal was made to remove the "O" permanently as a safety measure, but it was decided to reconstruct the "O" from wood covered with metal. The new, armored "O" was relocated some 50 feet from the site of the original. On Nov. 8, 1954, the "unblastable" letter was partially burned and on Dec. 5, 1955 OSC diehards unsuccessfully attempted to blow it up.

Whole 'O' taken

But perhaps the greatest (or worst) event, depending on what side of the fence you're on, was the theft of the "O" by the Aggies. The presence of the stolen "O" on the OSC campus was con-

firmed by the dean of men. An anonymous call to the "Barometer" said that the letter would be burned on the rook bonfire the next Friday or else be made into a revolving trophy, changing the colors from yellow to orange, depending on who won the "Civil War" game. It turned out that the "O" was sawed in five pieces and stolen by nine OSC fraternity pledges.

In retaliation, four Oregon let-kidnapped OSC's Homecoming queen and two princesses. The girls were held as hostages and used in negotiations for the return of the traveled O. After regaining the "O," the Ducks decided it should be burned as it was too contaminated by OSC's possession.

A new "O" of steel was built by Alpha Phi Omega, service

fraternity on campus, and is now located beneath the cross on Skinner's Butte. The new "O" is 26' by 30' and weighs one ton. It is inclined so that painters could slide more easily. Dedicated at 8:45 a.m. on May 17, 1958, a paint job by the frosh followed. Until its first paint job, the "O" was

covered by an orange colored prime coat. Thus, a new "O" took over the job of watching over Eugene, as its predecessors have done for over half a century.

The latest episode? The "O," during the weekend of Nov. 6 and 7, was turned a bright orange.

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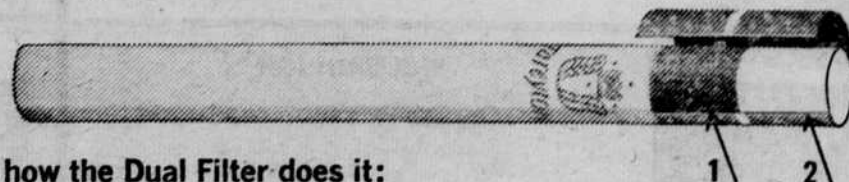
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