

'It became a tradition to be non-traditional'

By Joan Herman
Of the Emerald

Mention the 'good old days', and alumni's thoughts turn to their college days at the "U" and the year's big happening — homecoming.

Many hold images of freshmen obediently donning beanie caps on 13th Avenue. Of lighting four-story bonfires on the eve of the homecoming game in a field where the Art Museum now stands. And of co-eds loyally painting their school's "O" in yellow paint on Skinner Butte — only to have the rival Beavers erase their work with orange paint.

Tradition was in vogue in the 'good old days,' even up until the late 1960s. Then came the Viet Nam war, and the students said they had to attend to more important matters than keeping wayward freshmen in line. So students dropped traditions as enthusiastically as their parents created them.

Ironically, "It became a tradition to be non-traditional," says University archivist Keith Richard.

Perhaps one of the longest living — and interesting — homecoming traditions was that of freshmen initiation, which occurred during Homecoming Week. This was not an initiation restricted to Greeks — much to the chagrin of first-year students. All freshmen dutifully submitted to initiation ceremonies.

The time was pre-World War II. First-year male students were distinguishable by beanie caps, which had to be worn at all times on campus. Often, they also wore outlandish costumes to class and the soda fountain, as ordered by their "superiors," the sophomores. In shackles, they shined the school seal outside Villard Hall, then the center of campus. The seal now rests on the EMU breezeway. And in school-spirited fashion, freshmen had their hair shorn in the shape of "O's" — again, as ordered by the sophomores.



Photo courtesy University Archives

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These orders were disobeyed rarely — and for good reason. Each Friday, rebellious freshmen who had committed 14 "infractions" in the past week had their bottoms paddiwacked by gleeful sophomores — usually in front of a large crowd. "Naughty" first-year females were thrown into the pond near Deady Hall.

Because the tradition was enforced by sophomores, it was a "self-perpetuating delight," Richard says. Lowly freshmen knew their turn would come next year, so they patiently anticipated the time when

they would be the punishers.

Then came 1945 and the end of World War II. Many freshmen were worldly veterans and refused to obey the sophomores' commands. And so the tradition died.

Just as popular, especially with freshmen, was the bonfire tradition, which began about 1911. Freshmen built bonfires in Kincaid Field, where the Art Museum now stands.

The tallest bonfire was built in 1917. It stood four stories high and was 20 feet

wide. Freshmen worked all Homecoming Week to build the pile for the pyre. They collected wood from wherever they could find it. After Homecoming Week, "There wasn't a piece of scrap lumber in all of the county," Richard says. To adorn their mountainous creation, the freshman proudly perched a farmers stolen outhouse atop the heap.

Day and night, they guarded their creation from arson-minded sophomores, who

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