

Graduation trip down memory lane

□ Graduation traditions date back to 1878

For over a century, winding up four years of a college education and endeavors has been a difficult and somewhat scary activity for some graduates, but it has been pure relief for others.

It is an activity that has been occurring since 1878 when the first graduating class went through its commencement ceremony.

Although times have changed since that first ceremony, commencement as a whole, has remained quite similar to the original. Numbers have increased in terms of class size and it takes graduates a bit more time to go through the entire process, but in general the ceremonies are quite the same.

The first graduating class consisted of a mere five people and none of them wore those crazy looking caps and gowns that appear on our modern graduates.

As a matter of fact, the caps and gowns did not begin their graduate fashion fad until 1897.

"They were expensive and people just could not afford to order them back then," said Keith Richard, University archivist. "Graduates just dressed up and went as they were."

Richard said the diplomas were different in the "old days" as well as the dress. The first diplomas were much larger and printed on genuine sheep skin. In fact, they were so large that when framed they covered about a four foot by two foot space on the wall and they cost each graduate \$20.

That would seem to be quite a large piece of rolled up sheep skin to tote off the stage after accepting the diploma, but lucky for old time grads, this was not the case for those students of the past.



The class of 1899, pictured here in 1896, 1939 and 1949 (top to bottom) was one of the first to wear caps and gowns during commencement.


Turn to PAST, Page 10B

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