

Old Gold

The services of the eighty-sixth spring commencement at the State University of Iowa were drawing to a close. It was June 8, 1946, and President Virgil M. Hancher had just finished his charge to the graduates, when the majestic strains of the University hymn began to sound through the fieldhouse. The assembled audience stood and sang with emotion akin to reverence:

We shall sing and be glad with the days as they fly
In the time that we spend in thy halls,
And in sadness we'll part when the days have gone by,
And our paths turn away from thy walls.
Till the waters no more in thy river shall run,
Till the stars in the heavens grow cold,
We shall sing of the glory and fame thou hast won,
And the love that we bear for Old Gold.

Perhaps someone in that 1946 commencement audience chanced to wonder whence came the "Old Gold" of which they sang. The story began at a senior class meeting held in April, 1887, when a class member, Marvin H. Dey, suggested that a committee be appointed to decide upon the adoption of "College Colors" and a "College Yell", matters in which, he said, "we are sadly

behind the times". A committee was appointed with Mr. Dey as chairman and "gold" was recommended by this committee as the official University color. A mass meeting was called and the report of the committee was submitted and approved. One of the girls was wearing a bow of old-gold ribbon and this she tore into small pieces which were passed around to the group. The "sample" color soon became a general favorite.

"Bows and scraps of the *old-gold* ribbon are now the common adornment of S.U.I. youth and maid and the 'ever-busted' senior who is unable to steal or borrow old-gold is feign to bedeck himself in faded yellow and then to use his powers of argument in persuading others that he is right on top of the style", commented the *Vidette-Reporter*, semi-weekly publication of the State University of Iowa, on May 7, 1887.

At a baseball game between the State University and Cornell College, played at Mount Vernon on May 14, 1887, it was reported that the town's entire stock of old-gold ribbon was sold out to University students who adorned their hats, buttonholes, canes, and umbrellas with it. Some even tied the ribbon about their "graceful limbs at the bottom of their knickerbockers, by virtue of which they passed as 'Knights of the Garter.'"

By 1891 old gold had apparently been unoffi-

cially accepted as the University color, but an editorial in the *Vidette-Reporter* in the fall of 1892 condemned "the practice of wearing class, society and fraternity colors at inter-collegiate contests." It closed by saying, "We hope that in the future only the old gold will be worn by our students on such occasions and that other colors will be reserved for home field day and inter-class contests."

As might well be expected, it was often difficult for University supporters to obtain old-gold ribbon, and many shades of yellow and orange came to be used as substitutes. In 1894 a writer for the *S.U.I. Quill* was concerned with this problem: "The University colors as displayed at our recent field day were of all shades from old gold to a light orange. There is a decided difference between old gold and gold. Certainly we should have but one color or else combine the two. Old gold had always been accepted until last fall, when gold began to predominate. Which color do we accept as official?"

The *Vidette-Reporter* went even further in the controversy over colors and sponsored an election to determine whether gold or old gold was to be the color worn by University students at the State Field Meet on June 1, 1894. The Y.W.C.A. girls were sponsoring a fair on the day before the

meet, and the election was held at their request in order that they might know what color their novelties — banners, canes, and fans — should be. In announcing the election, the newspaper urged students, alumni, and faculty members to vote, and added: "The VIDETTE-REPORTER has always supported the 'old gold' and merchants have advertised with us that they were prepared to furnish the genuine 'old gold.' If it can be obtained we see no reason for changing and have no sympathy with those who desire a change simply to be changing." The outcome of the election was announced two days later by the headline, "Old Gold Wins". The vote was 213 for old gold and 98 for gold.

The next year, in February, 1895, President Charles A. Schaeffer met with the deans of the several departments and the presidents of the various classes to consider the advisability of adopting uniform class and department colors. After due consideration the committee decided upon old gold for the University, with the following department (college) colors: Liberal Arts, black; Law, royal purple; Medicine, red; Dentistry, pink; Homeopathic Medicine, white; and Pharmacy, lilac. Fifty years later the caps of the candidates for degrees revealed the following college colors: Graduate, black; Liberal Arts, white; Law, purple;

Medicine, green; Pharmacy, olive; Dentistry, lilac; Engineering, orange; Commerce, drab; and School of Nursing, salmon.

Not long after the decision had been made concerning colors, students began to realize that there should be an official University song. The *S.U.I. Quill* called attention to this lack on October 20, 1900, but it was not until the spring of 1905 that President George E. MacLean gave the matter publicity by offering a prize of twenty dollars for the best University song submitted by the first of April. Seventeen lyrics were entered in the competition.

On April 3, 1905, a committee of four — J. G. Gilchrist, H. E. Gordon, H. J. Prentiss, and Alice B. Chase — awarded the prize to John Carl Parish, a senior in the College of Liberal Arts, for his lyric, "Old Gold", set to the well-known tune, "Fair Harvard". In announcing their decision the committee members explained that they had "sought for a song which should express the true university spirit in words and music that would have survival power." They believed "Old Gold" met these qualifications.

At the forty-ninth annual commencement in June, 1909, "Old Gold" was first sung by the audience as a part of the commencement program. Since that time, the singing of "Old Gold" has

become a tradition at most University functions. The question asked by the *Daily Iowan* in 1905 — "Shall this song live?" — has been answered. Years have demonstrated that "Old Gold" does have the "sentiment expressed in words that give pleasure and have the power to move".

This year, as the University of Iowa celebrates its one hundredth anniversary, we remember the loyal students of former days who originated the wearing of the old gold. If we let our thoughts carry us forward to 2047 when the University of Iowa will be celebrating its bicentennial, we may imagine that the commencement audience will again pledge their loyalty:

Oh, heir of the glory of pioneer days,
Let thy spirit be proud as of old,
For thou shalt find blessing and honor and praise
In the daughters and sons of Old Gold.

CORNELIA MALLET BARNHART