Summer 2021

The Joint Archives Quarterly, Volume 31:02: Summer 2021

Maria Seidl

Geoffrey Reynolds

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.hope.edu/jaquarterly

Part of the Archival Science Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.hope.edu/jaquarterly/116

Published in: Joint Archives Quarterly, Volume 31, Issue 2, Summer July 1, 2021. Copyright © 2021 Hope College, Holland, Michigan.

This Newsletter is brought to you for free and open access by the Hope College Publications at Hope College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Joint Archives Quarterly by an authorized administrator of Hope College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@hope.edu.
In Hope College’s 155-year history, much time has been devoted to the creation and re-creation of many traditions. For example, the Pull, a tug-of-war contest with a 1,000 pound rope, was first recorded in 1898.\(^1\) The Nykerk Cup Competition is a contest focused on performance in oration, play, and song, began in 1935.\(^2\) Other traditions are newer like Dance Marathon, which began in 2000 at Hope College.\(^3\) These traditions have withstood time and attract new members every year.

However, not all Hope traditions have survived the test of time. The Hope College Sing was a college-wide singing competition in which sororities and fraternities competed. It is no longer an active tradition, instead residing in history books. May Day originated as a track and field day consisting of sports games, a banquet, and the crowning of a May Day Queen. Now, it is typically a day for seniors to skip their last day of classes and celebrate with friends at multiple residences.

Recently, Hope alumnus John H. Dryfhout ‘64 contacted the Joint Archives of Holland about a clipping from an old *Anchor* and a question. The clipping contained mention of a “Dimnent Cup,” of which Dryfhout had never heard. There were no articles or any references to the competition in books about Hope College. No existing research existed. Like a scene out of a movie, Dryfhout had effectively discovered the lost trophy of the Dimnent Cup. This was an opportunity to unearth a thread in Hope’s history that was completely forgotten.

John Dryfhout’s research question was assigned to me at the beginning of this semester. My assignment: Find out whatever I could about the Dimnent Cup for Dryfhout and other scholars interested in the subject. While prepping for months of research, five questions came into focus. What was the Dimnent Cup? Why did it start? What purpose did it serve on campus? Why did it end? Does the physical cup still exist? Armed with years’ worth of *Anchor* newspapers and *Milestone* yearbooks, the journey slowly began.

The Dimnent Cup was created in 1930 as a “great experiment” by the campus. The rivalry between freshmen and sophomores had reached a breaking point because multiple serious incidents had occurred in the previous years. Freshmen were thrown into the fish pond in Centennial Park in the middle of October, mass fights occurred, and foods, such as eggs and tomatoes, were thrown. Citing these incidents and others where students were seriously hurt, Hope College President Edward Dimnent presented the Dimnent Cup idea to the sophomores. An alternative to the hazing was proposed: a competition between the freshmen and sophomores based on physical merit.\(^4\) The September 24, 1930, *Anchor* proclaimed that the pervasive question on campus was “whether ‘twas nobler to fight every morning on the way to chapel or to do all the fighting on one day and then to end it?” To the relief of the campus, a formal competition was voted on unanimously by the sophomores first, and then the freshmen also voted in favor. Hazing of the freshmen was believed to be effectively abolished.\(^5\)

Curiously, this event was not meant to eliminate all violence between the freshmen and sophomores. Rather, it was meant to be condensed into one day. One

(continued on page 2)
afternoon was devoted to the contest in order to “fully satisfy the demand of the underclassmen for physical combat.” An article in the September 23, 1931, Anchor argued that the games were in reaction to the “haphazard and unsportsmanlike manner of the former years.” Though “kicking, punching, gouging, elbowing, and other means of roughing” were outlawed in 1931, the Anchor detailed violence almost every year. That same year, it was written that students had observed a student “trying to twist off Frank Visscher’s head.” The Anchor recorded recollections of “blood spilled” in 1935. Regardless if any rules were broken by either class, a committee on campus was put in charge of doling out punishments. The Hope College Kurfew Klub (H.K.K), composed of senior men, brought justice upon the rule-violators.

However, the creation of the games as an alternative to hazing was not without controversy. In the September 30, 1930, issue of the Anchor, an editorial entitled “Progress” contemplated the impact of the games on class relations. When considering the implications of ending hazing, the article posed three questions, “Is the arrangement fair to the classes involved?” “Can the freshmen be controlled without hazing?” and “Can class spirit be kept alive?” It was suggested that the agreement on the creation of the games by both the freshmen and sophomore classes indicated a desire for more civil relations. Moreover, the campus still had regulations in place to check the “dumb green children” through the Kurfew Klub. The editorial argued that class spirit could still be fostered through the green pots or beanies (small hats) and buttons given to freshmen, the Pull, class galas and parties, and the Dimnent Cup competition. To close, the author proposed that class spirit would potentially grow because of the games and prevent further injuries. With “progress” came hesitation and desire by some to cling to the status quo. The creation of the games was met with mixed reactions, as many longed for an end to the chaos of the former years and others feared an upset to the social order.

The competition was named after the current college president, Dr. Edward D. Dimnent, who had been president from 1919 and retired in 1931, the year after the games originated. Throughout the event’s lifetime, it was referred to by many names—the Dimnent Cup, the Dimnent Trophy, the Dimnent-loving Cup, the Frosh-Soph games, and just as a field day. The physical cup was donated by Dr. Dimnent and was awarded to the class that had accumulated the most points in the competition. After the games, the “Cup of Valor” was to be presented at an all-campus banquet put on by the college the night after the Pull. The physical cup was mentioned in the Anchor for the first few years. However, by 1938, the Anchor reported that the incentive to win was “not a gold cup, but a privilege.” Slim and tall in stature, the cup is engraved with leaf detailing, and inscribed at the base are the words “Freshman and Sophomore Trophy,” “Edward D. Dimnent,” and “1930.” The victors for every year are listed on the back until 1937. According to the Anchor, the cup potentially retired after 1937 for reasons unknown. The Dimnent Cup is currently located in the Joint Archives of Holland.

The actual competition consisted of an amalgamation of miniature contests. Each event was worth a certain number of points that would add up to a winner. Whichever class won could keep the cup for the full academic year, and then the competition would occur again. In 1930, when the games originated, there were five events: sandbag rush, rope tying contest, women’s chair rush, cane rush, and a flag rush with a greased pole. The competition culminated with the final event—the Pull. The events evolved with the incoming classes.
Notable events that were added over the duration of the games included hog tying, cock-fights, pillow fights, and the expansion of the women’s games. Nineteen thirty-one was the only year that hog tying was an event for the games since it became a separate Hope activity in the surrounding years.\(^{19}\) However, the cock-fights took place in at least 1932, 1934, and 1944.\(^{20, 21}\)\(^{22}\) The pillow fights became a staple event after it was introduced in 1931 until the game’s demise in 1945. This event was originally called “pole sitting,” in 1931 and was renamed “pillow fights” in 1932. Though pillow fights sound like harmless fun, the stakes were high. Competitors sat astride a log, called a horse, raised multiple feet off of the ground across from each other. Then, pillows were employed by participants to knock the other opponent off of the log and onto the ground.\(^{23}\) In 1934, men competed in a football rush where they had to capture the most footballs across the field.\(^{24}\) In 1939, there was a leap frog race; 1941, a sack race; and 1944, a baton relay.\(^{25} 26 27\)

The women’s competition began as one event in 1930. Women were only able to compete in a chair rushing competition. Not much is explained about the rules of this event. However, it can be assumed that the participants tried to capture a chair, as there were six chairs with two sophomores and freshmen for each chair.\(^{28}\) In 1931, there was no recorded women’s event.\(^{29}\) The following year, the event was a women’s obstacle relay.\(^{30}\) Starting in 1934, there was a handball game.\(^{31}\) By 1935, a three legged race was introduced that would become a staple in the following years.\(^{32}\)

However, as gender roles changed on campus, the games evolved, too. Nineteen thirty-five and 1936 were pivotal years for this shift. In 1935, the *Anchor* frequently published articles by female students expressing a desire for more rights on campus.\(^{33}\) This culminated in an all-female Pull put on by the freshmen and sophomore women in 1935 in reaction to a controversial win by the sophomore men.\(^{34}\) The female students voiced demands for inclusion in on-campus traditions and clubs. In reaction to rising tensions, Dr. John Nykerk created the Nykerk Cup competition in 1936, and the first female student body president, Helena Visscher, was elected.\(^{35}\)

In line with this desire for the expansion of women’s rights, in 1937, the women’s games were expanded to three events—a relay, three-legged race, and a tournament similar to soccer. As men were drafted into World War II and the campus demographic shifted to mainly women, even more events were added. In 1940, the events consisted of balloon-busting, football relay, football throw, potato race, and three 440 relays.\(^{36}\) In 1942, the events were football throwing, potato racing, balloon blowing, and running relays.\(^{37}\) In 1944, there was a three legged race, a bicycle race, and a football relay race.\(^{38}\) The games reflected the changing climate of the campus and the world as women fought for rights and space.

The Frosh-Soph games were held in October. The Pull occurred shortly after, but not on the day of the actual games. The Pull was seen as the place where real physical prowess could be on display rather than the games.\(^{39}\) Following was a campus-wide banquet put on by Student Congress and the campus. The cup was awarded to the winners and students were encouraged to bond with each other and their professors.\(^{40}\) It is impossible to tell who won each year of the games, because there were many years where the winner was never recorded. However, similarly to the Pull, it seems that nearly every year the sophomores beat the freshmen. In fact, there was only two freshmen wins clearly recorded, which occurred in 1944 and 1945.\(^{41}\)

The games had a traditional Hope set-up, where the freshmen and sophomores competed against each other. There were no upperclassmen mentors for the teams. Instead, upperclassmen were encouraged to watch, but they had no real stake in the battle. Potential participants underwent a health evaluation to make sure that they were physically fit enough to withstand the brutal fights during the games. The freshmen and sophomores were weighed either the day before the event or the day of and put into weight categories. The goal was to put people of similar sizes in groups together so that the fight was as fair as possible. Then, captains and teams were picked. Participants could only compete once—as either a freshman or sophomore.\(^{32}\)

As the games evolved and solidified its place in Hope tradition, the planning committee expanded. After 1930, the Student Congress was put in charge of hosting and running the event. Originally, it was just one or two chairpersons who planned the event. Then, referees were
chosen to adjudicate the events. In 1930, there was so much controversy over biased student referees that outsiders from the Holland community were chosen thereafter. By the 1940s, the committee consisted of a head chairperson, chairs of the men’s games, chairs of the women’s games, a publicity chairman, and other helpers. At least two judges, four referees, and one time keeper were employed outside of the freshmen and sophomores to keep the game fair. More roles were already assigned to the Pull. However, these roles, save for the publicity chairman, were exclusively for the Frosh-Soph games rather than both the Pull and the games.

Moreover, in 1938, the stakes of the competition changed. Traditionally, the freshmen had been subject to many regulations around campus. For example, freshmen could not fraternize with upperclassmen. The men had to wear green “pots” or hats. The women had to wear green ties or bows. The pots were to be worn at all times while on campus and then, after the year, they would be burned in a ceremonial, school-sanctioned bonfire. Freshmen had to open the doors around campus for upperclassmen (juniors and seniors) and show them certain signs of respect. The games put a wrinkle in this social order. Rules were put in place allowing freshmen to stop “potting” the upperclassmen, or following the specific rules of respect for freshmen, if they won the games. They still had to wear their signature green clothing items. Such was the case in 1944 when freshmen won the games. However, if the sophomore class won, they had the right to make the freshmen “pot”—a power that they had not previously had. Overall, the games were both influenced by and influenced the campus as the social hierarchy shifted, and the purpose of the games evolved when the women’s category expanded to host more events. As the Pull shifted into the spotlight on campus, the games found that less males participated. Moreover, the overall goal of preventing the hazing of freshmen by sophomores was only successful to an extent. Skirmishes still broke out on campus, like in 1941, when the freshmen and sophomores took paint brushes and fought around the campus observatory until property was damaged. Campus hazing was featured in the 1938 Anchor, when upperclassmen women paddled the Voorhees Hall girls. A picture described the initiation rites where the residents were made to find their way down a fire escape and then get paddled. In 1941, a freshman fraternity pledge wrote an editorial about how he “deplored his existence,” since he was constantly subject to dehumanizing hazing in front of his friends and girlfriend. Clearly, hazing was not completely abolished like the 1930 Anchor heralded.

The last year that the Anchor recorded the Frosh-Soph games alongside the Pull was 1944. The games had transformed from the cover story in the 1930s, to a small article in the 1940s. I could not find any record of it in the years after 1944. In 1942, no winner of the games was recorded. The Anchor noted that “while the games were of real interest to everyone, it is the annual pull that really determines the superiority of the freshmen or sophomore class.” In 1939, the Anchor mentioned that the traditional flag rush was unable to occur because of a lack of freshmen men. Instead, potential participants preferred to join the Pull or the football team. In years past, the Dimnent Cup had been the front page of the Anchor. However, by the end of the games, the records of it consisted of a few sentences on one of the back pages of the newspaper. There is no reason given in the Anchor for this change. It could be hypothesized that the upheaval of the end of the war and the influx of new students at Hope put the games on the back burner. A record number of clubs on campus provided alternative bonding opportunities for freshmen. Maybe the existence of the May Day games in the spring semester negated the need for games exclusively dedicated to the freshman-sophomore rivalry. Most likely, the interest in the Nykerk Cup for women and the Pull for men may have occupied all eligible participants.

Regardless, the fifteen year legacy of the Dimnent Cup had implications for Hope’s campus. It is important to consider how this history was effectively erased and forgotten. What other layers are there to Hope’s history that we have yet to uncover? Hope’s traditions are not just significant because of the stories of participation in the events each year. More importantly, they matter because of the insight they give us into what the context was that necessitated the creation and re-creation of the competition.
Pre-1930, the climate on campus was tense as fights broke out randomly. Hazing and underclassmen rivalry had boiled over to the point where the college president himself needed to get involved. The creation of the Dimnent Cup was an act of desperation and hope for a new campus-wide environment—a safer, "civilized," and unified future. When the women on campus called for greater equality for themselves in the latter half of the 1930s, the games reflected this desire with the expansion of the women's events. In 1938, the rules changed to give the freshmen a chance to stop potting. Moreover, as the world changed in the 1940s with the onset of World War II, the purpose of the Dimnent Cup shifted once again. For reasons only hypothesized, the Cup no longer served a necessary purpose on campus. Therefore, it fizzled out with no written explanation given. Through the Dimnent Cup, we can better understand how our current campus and traditions have come to be.

About the author:

Maria Seidl is from White Lake, Michigan, and is a senior at Hope College. She is pursuing a double major in History and Sociology. She is working as an archival assistant in the Joint Archives and an office assistant in the Registrar's Office. After graduating, Maria plans on entering the Peace Corps and then getting her master's degree in Social Work.

Endnotes
9."Sophs Defeat Men in Green," The Anchor, 9 October 1935, p. 3.
11.Ibid.
17."Sophs Win Inter-Class Games Thursday," The Anchor, 18 October 1939, p. 3.
20."Frosh-Soph Battles To Be Held Today And Tomorrow," The Anchor, 13 October 1932, p. 1.
24."Sophs Win Inter-Class Games Thursday," The Anchor, 18 October 1939, p. 3.
25.Ibid.
30."Frosh-Soph Battles To Be Held Today And Tomorrow," The Anchor, 13 October 1932, p. 1.
34."Freshmania," The Anchor, 23 October 1935, p. 3.
39."Sophs Win Inter-Class Games Thursday," The Anchor, 18 October 1939, p. 3.
40."All-College Reception on Friday Night," The Anchor, 30 September 1931, p. 1.
50."Sophs Win Inter-Class Games Thursday," The Anchor, 18 October 1939, p. 3.
53."Frat Pledge Deplores His Existence," The Anchor, 1 October 1941, p. 2.
55."Sophs Win Inter-Class Games Thursday," The Anchor, 18 October 1939, p. 3.
The 1938 Milestone yearbook introduction page for the sophomore class section included the “Dimnent Cup,” which they won that year.