No, these are not gang members performing a scene from "West Side Story!" This was an OSU tradition for about 45 years. It was held on the Oval and Ohio Field between Sophomore and Freshmen male students at the end of the school year in June. The referee of this event, which involved much scrambling and fighting for an object, was often the President of the University. The severity of injuries, the increase in class size, and a lack of interest caused the demise of this tradition in 1930.

OTHER NOTES: Object was to get the cane (one year 4 feet long) and conceal it some way to get it across the goal line. The teams (often in the 100's, in 1906 there were 1000 taking part) fought for 20 minutes and whoever had it at the end of that time, kept it for 1 year. People came from Campus and from Columbus to watch (1906 - 6900 spectators).

# 3 - WHAT WAS CANE RUSH?

THE CANE RUSH: AN HISTORICAL STUDY OF THE BIRTH, INSTITUTIONALIZATION, AND DEATH OF A CAMPUS TRADITION

by

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Every tradition grows ever more venerable. The more remote is its origin, the more confused that origin is. The reverence due to it increases from generation to generation. The tradition finally becomes holy and inspires awe. (Friedrick Wilhelm Nietzsche)

At colleges and universities traditions highlight the academic year. Typically, the campus calendar begins with the time-honored ceremony of convocation. A few weeks later, homecoming follows as students of the past and the present come together to celebrate the institution. Finally, the tradition of commencement ends the school year. Within student organizations themselves, from fraternities and sororities to scholarship groups, are more traditions. All of them take place on campuses steeped with memorials of the past, where buildings and streets commemorate previous generations of faculty, staff, and students.

One tradition common to American colleges and universities was the cane rush. Popular in the Nineteenth Century, it died in the Twentieth. At The Ohio State University, it lasted some seventy years, from 1881 to 1951. Because of its duration, there is a significant body of documentation that depicts the cane rush from its informal origins, points to its adoption as an official tradition and registers its decline into obscurity. The passage through this cycle illustrates the pressures of historical change upon the student and administrative subcultures within the university itself. The cane rush also illustrates changes in patterns of interaction between students and the university.
administrators, who presumed to govern them.

Essentially, the cane rush was a contest between rival classes of undergraduates, usually the freshmen and sophomores. In the Nineteenth Century, identification with class was a primary point of orientation in undergraduate life. Bonds of friendship between undergraduates—so natural among peers and so important in a new environment—frequently began within the framework of class organization and of class work. The prescribed curriculum standard to most colleges and universities before the 1870's allowed few electives. Therefore, undergraduates of the same year of admission had the same instructors and at the same time of day.

Group cohesion and identity on the basis of class manifested itself in many ways. In the beginning of the academic year, members of each class assembled to elect leaders. During the year, a class historian or poet recorded the deeds of the class for publication in the yearbook. Classes themselves commonly chose their own colors, mottos, and distinctive attire, including hats, ties, and walking canes.

Contests between differing classes, especially freshman and sophomores, marked undergraduate life in the Nineteenth Century. Some contests followed imagined or actual challenges from one class to another. Some, such as debates or class plays required formal organization and planning. Others took place almost spontaneously. All served to strengthen the identification of a student with his class.

In its simplest form, the cane rush pitted members of one
class against another. Typically, the winner succeeded in extracting
the class cane or canes from the rival class and carrying the
booty across the opponents goal. What distinguished the cane rush
from other contests of class was the exuberance of the combatants,
who wrestled, tore each others clothes and exchanged blows in
physical demonstrations of virility and loyalty to classmates.

Birth:

As a campus tradition, the cane rush began slowly, even
haltingly. A national collection of college words and customs
published in 1856 did not even refer to the cane rush as a feature
of campus life. It defined "class cane" as a mark of distinction
that identified a class. The same work referred to "rush" as a
word with many different meanings. At Yale, it meant a perfect
recitation, while at Dartmouth, "rushing" the freshmen meant
removing them from chapel.³ At that time, a cane rush was not a
distinctive event that merited its own definition and description.

The first example of a cane rush at The Ohio State University
may have happened in 1880 or 1881, some years after the opening of
classes in 1873.⁴ A poorly documented recollection is that the
seniors decided as a class to carry canes during the spring of
their academic year. On the first day, the seniors carried their
canes during compulsory attendance at chapel exercises. At close
of the services, the juniors attempted to extract the canes from
the swaggering seniors and break them. The struggle proceeded
fiercely until President Edward Orton appeared on the scene and
said sternly "Gentlemen cease this disturbance and pass to your places."

The next rush involved flags, not canes, and happened in 1886. During the evening of April 27, the sophomore class raised their class flag on the tower of University Hall, the principal classroom and administration building of the University. They also hung an effigy of a member of the junior class, complete with the olive green and pink colors of that class. This provoked the juniors to assemble the next morning, arm themselves with hickory clubs and attempt to burn the sophomore flag. In the ensuing struggle both classes had their flags torn. One combatant remembered with much exaggeration:

Our "champion," like a faithful bull,  
Fought till his eyes with blood were full,  
Still grasping in his strength so bold,  
That banner with the motto old.\(^{\text{6}}\)

The student newspaper, The Lantern, reported the event enthusiastically. It rejoiced that class spirit, which draws students together, had shown itself so dramatically at last. The rush itself was "manly" but not brutal. In fact, the newspaper claimed that the two classes had developed friendship and respect for each other because of this test of "prowess and bravery."\(^{\text{6}}\)

University administrators in the Nineteenth Century had a different view of rushes and of student life in general. Until the end of the Century, presidents believed that the primary purpose of higher education was to discipline the mental and moral powers of
the students. The powers of the will, emotion, and intellect in the young, it was believed, were not strong enough by themselves to guide students into healthy development. Only careful guidance and close supervision by faculty and presidents could save youths from themselves. Prescribed courses in ancient Greek and Latin served as a healthy discipline for the mind, even though the curriculum itself had little direct relevance to the economic and professional opportunities available in an industrializing society.¹

In this ideological framework, presidents intended that colleges be "citadels of discipline." The campus was to be a carefully regulated environment, controlled by the president, where students learned lessons of discipline and morality. Of course, presidents and faculty generally believed that students could not be trusted to choose courses. A prescribed curriculum, without electives, characterized the majority of colleges and universities until the 1890's. Within the classroom, memorization and recitation disciplined, it was thought, the mental faculty and will power of each student. Outside of classes, students faced more regulation and supervision. At most institutions, their rooms even off campus could be visited and searched by faculty. All student organizations were a potential threat to campus authority and had to be approved and supervised.²

In September of 1873 The Ohio State University began as The Ohio Agricultural and Mechanical College. Based on the federal Morrill Act of 1862, one of its principal missions was to serve
society by providing practical instruction in agriculture and engineering. This represented a new venture in American higher education in Ohio.

In many ways, however, the new college began as "old wine in new bottles." Changes in the relations between student and faculty took place slowly. After all, the college stood in the shadow of the state legislature, to whom it looked for financial support as well as approval.

In fact, the traditional view of education as the development of mental and moral faculties prevailed at the new campus. The first president, and his next three successors, were ordained ministers. Their presidential addresses typically stressed the moral education point of view. During the first thirteen years of classes, the curriculum of the university had only prescribed courses, without electives. A system of demerits served to tally infractions of discipline until 1887. Twenty demerits in one term or forty in a year led to expulsion. Meanwhile, attendance at chapel services, during which the president presided, remained compulsory until 1900.⁹

Students then, as now, differed with those in authority who presumed to govern them so totally. Rebellions and riots of students were well known in American colleges and probably only rendered presidents and professors more determined to control students. At The Ohio State University, students challenged authority in numerous ways. A poem in the student yearbook of 1883 expressed a defiant attitude:
We all are here to bow our head. 
And pray to live when we are dead; 
And march like cattle to our stalls, 
While mourning drapes the college walls 
From senior down to lowest prep 
Who looks with awe at every step. 

The Trustees do as we all know 
That we may thus to heaven go 
May they go there before we do 
And tell them we are coming too. 

Students at Ohio State, as elsewhere, were gregarious. They formed their own societies, which, the president and his faculty sought to keep under close scrutiny, especially those that requested the use of university buildings. Thus in 1874 the faculty approved the formation of the Deshler Society, a literary society, and the use of a room in the sole building on the campus as a library and meeting place, provided that President Edward Orton be an ex-officio member. And in 1885 the faculty warned student literary societies that their rooms were not to be used for social purposes. They even denied a request to host a reunion of alumni in a room reserved for literary societies.

At times, the existence of class organizations could benefit the president and faculty in controlling student life and enforcing discipline. In theory it would be easier to use student officers to impose orders fashioned by the faculty and president. Thus, in 1889 the faculty requested that the senior class take responsibility for auditing attendance at daily chapel and record the names of those who failed to attend. The seniors countered with their own proposal. They offered to assist the faculty but
only if seniors received an annual holiday as reward for their efforts. Although there was no holiday, the students did achieve something. The faculty recommended that the president report to the trustees that there was no way to enforce the rule for compulsory attendance at chapel.12

In this social context, the cane rush began as a flashpoint of conflict between students and administration. Students saw the rush as an opportunities for demonstrations of "manliness" and for bonding between students who came from different backgrounds but were thrust in a common environment. As the students saw it, only good could come from manifestations of "class spirit." In 1884 the Lantern editorialized:

Class and college spirit develops the characters of the students. It awakens energies which would, perhaps, never be awakened by any other means. There are students here now who are leaders of their fellows, not only in thought but in action, and who had they not been aroused by the spirit of their class-mates, would have gone though unknown except as mediocrities.

The most powerful energies generally lie dormant until, by some powerful excitement, they are aroused from their slumber. When we check the class and college spirit in the students, we are feeding the most fatal of anesthetic to the finest talents and energies of our fellows.13

A few years later, in 1890, The Lantern reported another cane rush and commented that "Those who come here and attend only the curriculum of studies make a grave mistake. They lose that part of college which is like the life of the big world about us."14

Unless students took part in the organizations and events sponsored by their peers, they would be ill prepared to enter and compete in the social, business, and political spheres of non-campus life. From this vantage point, even the local cane rush had larger significance as tests of the energy, manliness and loyalty required
in the adult world. It was the extra-curriculum, not the classroom, that really mattered.

The first presidents saw the cane rush much differently. They could not predict where or when it would happen. Its spontaneous nature, usually the result of some provocation real or imagined, meant that the rush would disrupt classroom activities. As an unplanned event, the cane rush had no fixed duration. In fact, the rush of 1889, was said to have lasted one and one-half hours. Finally, the early cane rushes had few rules or vestiges of authority. Typically, a member of the junior or senior classes served as referee. In the fray itself, the combatants sometimes crossed the ill defined boundary separating enthusiasm from violence. Presidents and professors, conscious as they were of the opinion of legislators and parents, could hardly be as light-hearted about the level of violence as the student newspaper was in describing the cane rush of 1890:

Fierce as the struggle had been, in spite of sprained ankles, torn clothes, mashed noses, broken heads, scratches and bruises, not the slightest ill-feeling was manifested by anybody.¹⁶

Gratuitous violence and wanton destruction of property characterized the cane rush for much of its existence. At times, even student leaders spoke against the excesses of the event. When high-spirits transformed enthusiasm into rowdiness, intervention from the president was likely. Thus, in October of 1893 the student editor suggested that the freshmen and sophomore classes compete against each other in a football game rather than a cane rush, which he described as "a brutal display which encourages so
much anger and passion." At best, the suggestion merely delayed what followed. The rush of 1894 took place in February and proved so violent that the *Lantern* complained, "If our young men are to do that for which in the ordinary walks of life they would have to answer to the law of the land, it is high time that the iron hand of discipline be imposed. University history should not be blotted by the record of many such affairs as occurred last Thursday." Next October, an article entitled "Good bye, Cane Rush" the newspaper observed that the cane rush had been forbidden by order of the president. A football game, relatively orderly and non-violent by comparison with the cane rush, would take its place.

Presidential dictate failed to quell the spirit of youth and the fervor for contests between classes. In 1896 the forbidden cane rush happened again. This time the sophomores broke chairs and used the arms and backs to drive freshmen from a class assembly. Outside of the building a rush took place, with the customary violence followed by dunking of contestants into the nearby pond. Afterwards, a meeting of the sophomores resolved that no disrespect to university authority had been intended. In the future, the class would obey all rules of the institution. President James Canfield held a special meeting of both classes, and accepted the apologies and explanations of both classes. He reinstated the students who were expelled but warned that students at a university had the responsibility to behave as adults. Otherwise, a closer supervision more like that of a small college would be needed.
The student yearbook issued the next spring illustrated that the rush itself was firmly rooted in the spirit of class rivalry and organization. It continued to be a point of defiance of the administration. One of the disobedient sophomores wrote an exaggerated account of the valor of his class in the fray. A sketch of the rush and a poem suggested a defiance of the authority of the president in extra-curricular activities:

This is the rush
That worried the students,
That run the Lantern,
Light of the University.,
That vexed the profs.,
That bow to the Prexie,
That killed the football team,
That runs the college,
Pride of the Buckeye State. 22

Two additional cane rushes took place in 1897 and 1898. Finally, in 1899 President Canfield resigned from the university in 1899 and accepted a less turbulent position as a librarian for Columbia University.

Institutionalization:

The decade of the 1890's were particularly significant for higher education. It was a time when the modern university and its patterns of administration began taking shape. Factories and corporations needed managers with skills of organization and
communication. Academic credentials identified those who had the potential for management from those who did not. In great numbers, parents encouraged their young to extend the years of formal education, first in high school, then in college. For colleges and universities, enrollments boomed as never before.

Within universities themselves, the structure of the modern research institution began taking shape. As the numbers of students grew, so too did the numbers of faculty. Changes in the curriculum that permitted students to choose more electives, courses more relevant to career paths outside the campus, accentuated divisions among faculty by professional discipline and by administrative department. Layers of specialized bureaucracy further fragmented the institution. The administration of the library, for example, became the bailiwick of a librarian rather than the part-time concern of one faculty member, as it had been in the past.

The president of the modern university became the educational equivalent of a captain of industry. As the institution became a conglomeration of well-defined constituencies—faculty, student, administrative, alumni, and donors—the president became a manager who stood apart from a single constituency. The president was no longer simply the first among the faculty as he had been in earlier times.

At the beginning of the Twentieth Century, the evolution in the role of the college president drew formal attention. In 1900, a book entitled *College Administration* claimed to be the first to
analysis the college presidency as a management position. Its author, Charles Thwing, was president of Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. During his career he wrote frequently about higher education and the duties of the president. Typically, Thwing described the duty of the president as keeping relations among the numerous constituencies in delicate balance. In a later work, The College President, Thwing presented his view of relations with students:

The life of the college is a highly organized and complex life. Its organization numbers hundreds of clubs and societies. Indeed fraternities or sororities form about one-half of the whole number. The self-governing associations of students are the most inclusive and representative of all the undergraduate bodies. They serve and usually serve well, to regulate many informal affairs. They are also a sort of prophetic training school in fundamental human relationships. To all such societies, the president holds relations.

Clearly, the task of the modern president was to work with, to manage, and even to encourage the organization of students and their involvement in extra-curricular life. Students were one among many deserving constituencies needing presidential attention and cultivation, not simply threats to institutional order.

The changed administrative attitude toward students also reflected a contemporary change in social awareness. At the beginning of the Twentieth Century, psychologists and sociologists first identified adolescence as a distinct stage in the life cycle. From this perspective, which was remarkably similar to that of student leaders, the extra-curriculum of the adolescent could be a laboratory in adolescents learned the lessons of
leadership, and competition and cooperation that would prepare them for life after graduation. For the modern administrator, the challenge was to encourage the extra-curriculum without losing control over the students who participated.²§

In 1899 William Oxley Thompson, then president of Miami University, became president of The Ohio State University and a new era began. Dr. Thompson would remain as president until 1925, having served more years than any president at the university before or since. During his administration of twenty-six years, the university grew in enrollment from 1149 to 11,535. As the numbers of students increased, so too did the number of courses, faculty, buildings, and administrative and academic units. During the Thompson administration, the university added a medical school, a hospital, numerous departments and colleges, a graduate school and even built a special building to serve as the library. Thompson, himself, achieved national stature as a "captain of higher education" as his university grew to impressive size.

As early as 1899, his first year as president, Dr. Thompson confronted the student tradition of the cane rush. It happened in October, a few weeks after Thompson became president. Rather than wait for the rush to begin spontaneously as the result of some provocation, Thompson himself orchestrated the event. He ordered the sophomores to prepare for a rush and then encouraged the freshmen to either have a rush now or not at all. At chapel Thompson told the participants that he had no objection to the annual rushes if they were conducted in an orderly and gentlemanly
manner. The student newspaper itself, editorialized "The part the president played last Tuesday in regard to that inevitable fray, the annual rush between the freshman and sophomores, probably went farther towards bringing himself and the students into the closest possible touch with each other than any one act which he will ever find within his power to perform." 27

With the finesse of a modern college president, Thompson spanned a gap between the subculture of the students that emphasized physical virility and class loyalty and that of college administration and its need for order. What had been spontaneous, without official approval and exclusively student was to become sanctioned as an official, regulated, and orderly tradition of the institution.

Thompson's involvement with the cane rush increased with time. In 1900 representatives of the sophomore class approached Dr. Thompson in University Hall, and announced that they were challenging the freshman class to a rush. President Thompson encouraged the freshmen to take up the challenge and administered the event himself by tossing his hat in the air after twelve minutes, as a signal to end the contest. The student newspaper waxed enthusiastic about the new president by announcing "A new epoch has certainly been reached in college life and class spirit which we firmly believe is largely due to the wise policy of our beloved president." 28 Actually, Thompson had shrewdly turned a point of contention into an opportunity to manage student activities.
In the years that followed, president Thompson continued to play a prominent role in rendering the cane rush into an official tradition, replete with rules, time, and place. Typically, the cane rush began in September or early October, at the beginning of the academic year. In October of 1903 the president read to the assembled freshmen and sophomores a set of rules for the rush, designated the goals across which the cane had to be carried, and set a time limit of twenty minutes. So closely identified with the cane rush was Thompson that in 1904 the event had to be delayed some minutes until the students could locate the president.29

The change in presidential strategy was a pragmatic recognition of changed realities. The university of 1900 was different from that of 1881, when the cane rush may have begun. Then, student enrollment numbered 280. By 1900 students were 1252 in number. Their organizations had also multiplied, from 16 in 1880 to 54 in 1900. To continue to act towards the extra-curriculum as unfortunate or accidental was to miss opportunities for managing student relations. The better strategy was to make use of student organizations and student traditions as occasions to celebrate and to build good memories about the institution among the students. They, after all, would eventually become alumni and potential contributors of resources and new generations of students. The direct involvement of the president helped to assure that the traditional contest remained a friendly one that left neither hard feelings nor broken bones.

In 1907 Thompson used his influence over the cane rush to
extend his power over student life. It had always been difficult to keep hazing in check in the charged atmosphere of class rivalry and the cane rush. Frequently, in the days before the contest the rival classes would taunt each other. Occasionally the sophomores, who usually had the advantage of familiarity with each other and better organization, seized freshmen and administered haircuts. In September of 1907 a group of Sophomores not only seized a leader of the freshman but held him hostage so that he could not participate in the cane rush. Thompson suspended three sophomores involved and commented that while a well conducted cane rush could be made to serve a good purpose, the hazing that took place before and after the event violated state law. Therefore, the president had no choice but to abolish the cane rush because of its association with hazing. Thompson later reinstated the students when class leaders announced that in the future they would discourage hazing.

The link between the cane rush and the governance of hazing became stronger in 1908. In April the freshman class petitioned the president to restore the cane rush. They felt the cane rush was a "fair and manly" contest between the two lower classes. So strongly did they feel about the cane rush that they offered to refrain from hazing at any time, and to follow any regulations that might be issued for the cane rush by the president or the student council, which had been established in 1906 to assist in the coordination of student activities. In September the Student Council also petitioned the president and guaranteed that there
would be no hazing. The president relented and the cane rush took place again in 1908. No student noticed, however, that the president had inserted himself into what had been an informal student custom, become its official sponsor, and then used that tradition as a bribe to keep hazing in check. For many years after the incident of 1907 the caution against hazing became part of the annual announcement of the impending cane rush.

With the sponsorship of Thompson and the assistance of student organizations, the cane rush reached a peak of popularity. So numerous were spectators that it was possible for the student organization responsible for organizing the cane rush to charge a fee for admission. The rush of 1908 for example, was reported to have drawn some 10,000 spectators. In a field roped by The Student Council to keep spectators from participating some 350 freshmen with faces painted fought 250 sophomores, seized the sophomore cane and carried it across the goal line. Typically, the victorious class celebrated with bonfires in the evening and paraded in their "nightshirts."  

The remarkable ingenuity of the sophomore classes helped to make the cane rush entertaining and memorable. Outnumbered by the freshmen, the sophomores relied upon their superior organizational skills and their experiences with the cane rush of the previous year. One year the sophomores had a cane that was collapsible like a telescope and could be smuggled across the goal. Another year the sophomores dropped into a sewer tunnel and maneuvered the cane underground until the freshmen goal had been crossed. A popular
trick was to have a bogus cane to confuse the freshmen until the real one crossed the goal. One particularly clever strategy was to disguise a sophomore as a photographer and have him casually walk the hidden cane across the freshman goal. In another year the sophomores threw sneezing powder at the freshmen, a tactic that failed when the wind blew it back upon the sophomores. Strategies such as these rendered the annual contest more than a test of strength and stamina and helped to create excitement and anticipation among the participants and the crowds of observers.

Thompson became particularly proud of the cane rush as a university tradition that he had done so much to create. In 1915 he commented,

I wish to call attention publicly to the fact that this autumn cane rush has now become one the important public events in the academic year....I am pleased to know that for more than a decade the annual cane rush at Ohio State University has been under reasonable regulations and has become an increasingly interesting event. The fact that several thousand people come up each year to witness the event is proof of the popular interest quite equal to that in one of our football games."

In 1920 Fox studios filmed the cane rush and planned to add it to its news film for national distribution. Unfortunately, there was so much tearing of clothing in the cane rush of that year and such embarrassment that the editors clipped the footage of the event."

Thereafter, warnings against excessive tearing of clothing also became part of the annual notice of the cane rush.

Death:
At the height of its popularity in the early 1920's, the cane rush already had the elements that would cause its demise. The boom in enrollment that followed World War I, increased the disparity of numbers between the freshmen and sophomore classes. As an example the cane rush of 1919 pitted 1100 freshmen against 125 sophomores. The student newspaper itself speculated that some sophomores stayed away because of the disparity of numbers. Typically, the outnumbered sophomores could not prevent the freshmen from surrounding each of their members, finding the cane and carrying it across the goal lines. As a consequence, the contests became very one-sided. Victories by the sophomores became a rarity and drew much attention. Cane rushes also became very brief. That of 1925, for example, lasted only four minutes in what the Lantern described as a "dud."

Numbers, alone, however, do not sufficiently explain the decline of what had once been an official tradition that had attracted national attention. In 1929 the organizers had the classes elect student gladiators in equal numbers. Seventy-five freshmen competed against seventy-five sophomores. This, too, however, failed to revive and sustain popular and student interest in the cane rush. In fact, the student newspaper mourned, "We are sorry indeed to see another of Ohio State's old and memorable traditions go into oblivion, as have many others which were strictly observed years ago."

One reason for the decline was the absence of President Thompson. Thompson, who had done so much to transform an informal
student custom into an institutional tradition, retired in 1925. His successor, George Washington Rightmire, lacked the personal commitment to the event that Thompson had. While Thompson frequently presided over the cane rush, in the Rightmire administration others took that role. Sometimes it was the editor of the student yearbook. Other times the dean of students was in charge. All of the surrogates lacked the stature of the president in adding institutional significance to the contest.

Another factor was the change in student life in the 1920's. In that era, membership in academic class mattered less than participation in fraternities, sororities, and other student organizations. They numbered much more in the 1920's than they did in the 1880's. In these organizations, whose members represented all classes, membership in a particular class mattered little. Cohesion of class and rivalry between the classes counted for much less in the bonds of friendship between students in the 1920's than the 1880's. In fact, the cane rush had been so successful in undermining the hazing that was the spice of class affiliation that by 1926 the newspaper observed that the cane rush itself was the only relic of inter-class fights. Non-fraternity hazing had practically disappeared.36 If the cane rush had become a bland affair, it was because the class rivalry which was its origins was no more.

Another factor was the generation who were students in the 1920's. It was an era in which the young questioned more than ever before the conventions and traditions of the past. In numerous
ways—drinking, fashion, dance, music and dating—the students of the 1920's questioned the conventions and traditions of the past. In 1929 one student, who claimed to speak for the "intelligencia" noted that "We represent an age that is done with the sentimental customs of the past. Why should we continue on the Ohio State campus the more or less silly ideas of our predecessors." The onset of the Great Depression at the end of 1929 encouraged more to question the values and customs of the past.

The transformation of the cane rush from tradition to an oddity of memory was a national phenomenon in the 1920's. In 1932, no cane rush took place at The Ohio State University "for the simple reason that no one cared to be bothered." It was the first time since 1895, when president Canfield forbade it, that the cane rush had not taken place. Efforts to revive the tradition throughout the 1930's failed. By 1940 the cane rush was only a memory. It reappeared in May of 1948 as part of "traditions week," a nostalgic celebration of all traditions as a festival of spring. The last known took place in 1951.

Conclusion:

The rise and fall of the cane rush is important for what it suggests about tradition in an academic setting. As a link with the past, traditions help to create a sense of unity or commonality in an institution whose members had diverse backgrounds and interests. As social institutions, colleges and universities
experience an extraordinary rate of demographic change. Each fall, 
the population of every campus changes by at least one-fourth as a 
new class of freshman replace the seniors who left in the spring. 
Unlike high schools, the new students come from different parts of 
the state, nation, and even the world. They bring with them 
different levels of emotional maturity and diverse backgrounds of 
group and personal history. Typically, new graduate students and 
faculty also arrive in the fall and add their own diversity to the 
whole.

In its early years, the tradition of the cane rush united in 
contest the members of different student classes when class itself 
was a foundation of student life. Efforts of presidents, 
suspicious of the extra-curriculum, to prevent the rush only 
helped to make it more popular among the students, who generally 
did not share the concerns of the faculty. The genius of President 
William Oxley Thompson was to embrace the cane rush as an official 
tradition which the president could manage and whose excesses could 
be contained in regulation. In sanctioning the tradition, Thompson 
asserted his influence over the student extra-curriculum and 
succeeded in bringing his office into an unprecedented harmony with 
students and their organizations. Thompson used the official 
tradition of the cane rush to persuade students do away with much 
of the time-honored tradition of hazing of freshmen.

Traditions, however, also reflect the social forces 
within the institutions that celebrate them. As points of 
institutional unity, they are intersections of the subcultures of
students and of administrators. Changes in the size of the student populations and in the persona of administrators also shape institutional traditions. Some die but others flourish from generation to generation. At the Ohio State University, changes in the size of the university, a shift away from class as the focus of student life, and transitions in administrative leadership caused the demise of the cane rush.

NOTES


4. The basis for this story is a typescript and undated note found among a file of photographs about the cane rush at The Ohio State University Archives. No other documentation has been found.

5. *The Makio*, vol. VI (Columbus, Ohio 1886), [not paginated].

6. The Ohio State University *Lantern*, May 6, 1886, 99.


11. Faculty Minutes, March 7, 1874, The Ohio State University Archives.

12. Ibid., May 6, 1885.

13. Ibid., October 9, 1889.


15. Ibid., October 3, 1890, 3.

16. Ibid., June 13, 1890, 223.

17. Ibid., October 17, 1893, 2.

18. Ibid, February 14, 1894, 2.

19. Ibid., October 3, 1894, 1.


21. Faculty Minutes, November 1, 1896.

22. Makio, (vol. XVI), 1897, 297.


24. Vesey, The Emergence of the American University, 302-312.


27. Lantern, October 11, 1899, 1.

28. Ibid., October 3, 1900, 2.

29. Lantern, October 7, 1903, 1; Lantern, September 28, 1904, 1.

30. Ibid. October 2, 1907, 1.

31. Petition of the Class of 1911, Records of President William Oxley Thompson, Record Group 3/e, box 11, folder 32, The Ohio State University Archives.

32. Lantern, September 30, 1908, 1.

33. Ibid., September 28, 1915, 1.
34. Ibid., September 20, 1920, 4.

35. Ibid., October 13, 1929, 2.

36. Ibid., October 5, 1926, 2.

37. Ibid., October 23, 1929, 2. For an analysis of historical changes in student subcultures see Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, Campus Life: Undergraduate Cultures from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987).


39. Lantern, October 9, 1933, 2.
Cane Rush of 1919
Cane Rush of 1929. Note the sparse number of participants and spectators. (35-45)
Cane Rush of 1920. Note that President Thompson is presenting the cane and explaining the rules.