Perspectives

A personal view of the University

Order and Decorum in Multiples of Four

Arthur W. Hoffman, professor of English, is the reigning University marshal. Each spring he commands a corps of faculty and staff volunteers who guard Commencement against utter chaos. Hoffman's present term as head marshal is the frosting on 30-plus years of marshaling at various ranks; his tales are tales of Commencement through the years.

After teaching at Yale for four years, I came to Syracuse as an assistant professor of English in 1953. Within a few years I, as a young faculty marshal with duties related to the student procession, came to know Archbold Stadium in the pleasant season of Commencement.

I had to see that two files of graduates, headed for the east end of the field, turned the corner and proceeded when the seating marshals were ready for them. The task was not beyond the wit of man, and for several years I accomplished it successfully. Generally the sun shone, the temperature was comfortable, and students and faculty were in a state of amiable good humor. Good duty.

Then my assignment was changed; I was promoted to the tunnel. At the west end of Archbold there was a large tunnel entrance at ground level that led from outside the stadium directly into the straightaway of the running track. It was borne in upon me that mine was a position of some importance—not that I could send the procession to Montreal instead of Buffalo, but because I had to hold everybody up at this point while marshals made sure the students were in four columns.

Fortunately, I had several able assistants, including a distinguished professor of mathematics who had a tranquilizingly calm and confident grasp of four as a numerical entity. With them, I had two or three minutes to teach the number four, both as abstract concept and as actual physical arrangement. On the whole, we succeeded. In a few years, we extended the chalk-lined lanes from the track through the tunnel and on outside to facilitate the learning process.

Over this period, we dispensed 85 safety pins, 23 paper clips, 6 yards of Scotch tape, plus 18 rubber bands to students in need and gave 63 percent of the students the correct answer to the question, Which side does the tassel go on? All of this on top of our swift pedagogy with the number four.

When I began my duty as a marshal, Professor A. McKinley Terhune, a Harvard man, was running the show, but during my distinguished service in the tunnel, Professor Rowland P. Graeber, a Yale man, had become University marshal. He brought home to me a fact to which I had given very little thought. There was always the possibility that it would rain on Commencement day, and all of our mathematical achievements in the tunnel, even our extended chalk lines, would become irrelevant. At this point I learned that there was a Rain Plan and that it involved setting up the Onondaga County War Memorial every year, just in case. Probably because of my success with the Point Four Program, I was chosen for promotion to assistant marshal and put in charge of the Rain Plan.

After a briefing, I discovered the breadth and numbers of my command: I was in charge and could order myself to do anything. I retired to my home to reflect on my rise in status, and at this time my eye happened to fall on my daughters; two of the three clearly were no longer infants. The eldest—I guess she was seven or eight—was promoted on the spot. For a number of years she had the privilege of being barked at by me on the afternoon before Commencement in the vast, resonant, empty space of the War Memorial, while we unrolled yards of orange ribbon to mark off blocks of seats and expertly wielded shears, marking pencils, Scotch tape, and four-by-six cards.

The counting involved in this setting went so far beyond the number four as to boggle the mind: 837 liberal arts students in a section where each row had 14 seats. But then we took flight beyond mathematics into prophecy and a still more arcane form of math called prophesied percentages. Because there were not enough seats in the floor-seating area of the War Memorial for every degree candidate, a special formula was introduced to reduce the number of seats reserved for each school. This formula was based on the assumption that if it rained, quite a few graduates would not take the trouble to get to the War Memorial.

Application of this formula required a certain genius. Different percentages of attendance were prophesied for Ph.D. candidates on the one hand and bachelor's degree candidates, school by school, on the other. The mysterious efficacy of this formula, in all of its variations, often made me tremble as I applied it to marking off seats. In about four hours, my daughter and I could finish the task and pronounce a weary and prayerful benediction on the whole thing.

Very early the next morning several sages would meet in the Administration Building to divine the weather. It was their solemn task to determine no later than 7:45 a.m. whether rain would fall on Archbold between 9 and noon. Influenced, I believe, by the mysterious character of the War Memorial seating formulas, the sages never once foresaw rain. (I consign to oblivion the one occasion when, despite this, it did rain. . . . *Errare humanum est.*) Consequently the graduates *never* went to the War Memorial. The ways of the wise are unsearchable.

Then, one later year, the sages gathered in the early morning and it was dark. Not only was it dark, but it was raining. The sages got wet when they came to their meeting and, looking out the window for the next hour or so, they were forced to conclude that it was raining. Soon the decree came down. The Rain Plan will be in effect.

By this time, Manley Field House had replaced the War Memorial as the rain alternative. Conditions there were both very wet and very warm, and in the seating area humidity was somewhere off the chart. For many friends and relatives there were no seats. Faculty members marched in long procession to their reserved seats, whereupon a volatile genius intervened: "The faculty will relinquish their seats to our guests who are standing."

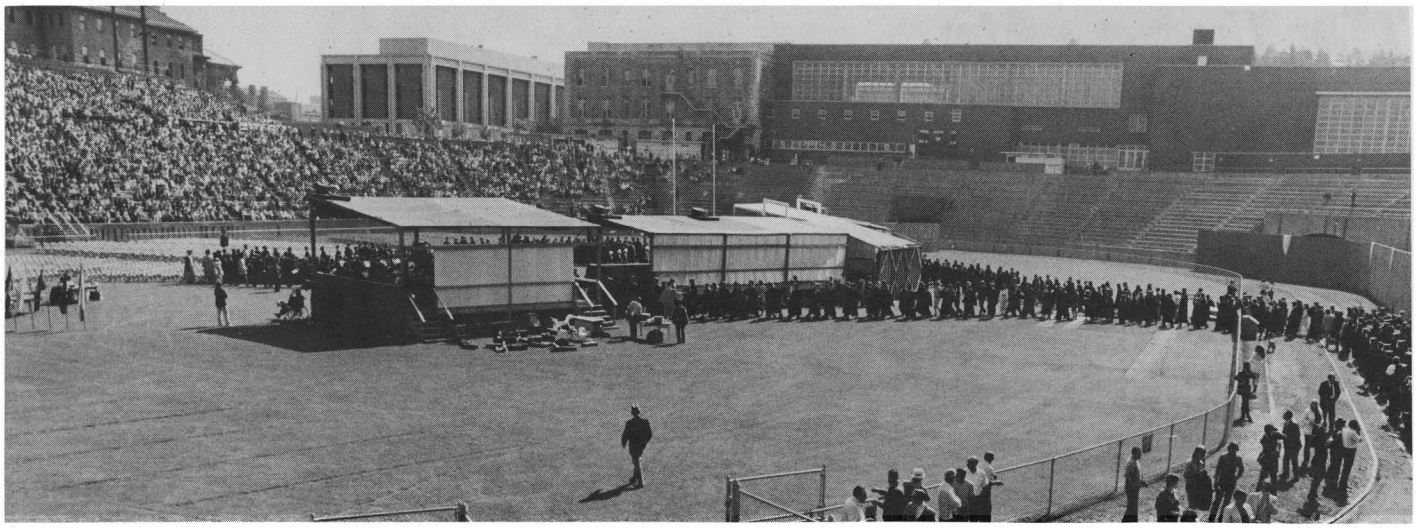
The faculty procession marched out again. Standing in the office wing, I saw these generous heroes come. They were, indeed, sweating in their black robes, but I am obliged to record my further impression: they were smiling.

While the Carrier Dome was being built, Commencement was at Manley, rain or shine. I found that I was to be again in the "tunnel configuration" but relocated to an area outside a Manley entrance. Degree candidates would assemble on Coyne Field, and the multitude would approach in the traditional four columns, unconfined by tunnel walls and without benefit of chalk lines. Moreover, we had lost our mathematics professor.

There was, however, an unexpected and sinister development. The students approached when from behind the sparse shrubbery, crawling out of the lawns, even from behind a few trees and poles, emerged figures with cameras. The hefty ones emerged from behind the shrubs, and tall, slim ones from behind the trees and poles. They made themselves obstructions to our parade.

My marshals, however, focused on the number four, and when the signal came for the school to move in, things were really quite simple. I spread my arms wide, embraced two surprised photographers, and lifted them to the sidelines. Four advancing columns are not to be trifled with.

The great day came at last. Commencement 1981 would be in the Carrier Dome—seats for all students, seats for all guests, no sages scanning the skies. University Mar-



When Commencement was in Archbold, students marched four abreast, then split into pairs. The stewards of this system were the faculty marshals.

shal Peter Cataldi made me his associate marshal, since my famous four function had faded into an archetypal two-by-two arrangement, two columns around the west end and two around the east end.

And now, as University marshal, with my genial associate marshal, Professor James Wiggins, I ascend the platform as the promised land that Moses never entered and see before me, as I look out over the seated students, the physical fruition of an abstruse mathematical principle: $2 + 2 = 4$.

—Arthur W. Hoffman

Changing Our Tune

Last year, Dale Tussing, professor of economics, chose an unlikely extracurricular activity to pursue. He approached first the University Senate, then the Chancellor's Office, asking both to support a new lyric for the "Alma Mater"; both agreed. Here Tussing relates why the University has ever-so-slightly revised its song.

Tussing's Syracuse credentials, incidentally, go beyond faculty membership. He, his wife, and three of his five children are alumni; a fourth will enroll after high school.

When I first heard the Syracuse University "Alma Mater" played on the Crouse College chimes, shortly after I arrived in Syracuse as a graduate student in 1958, I recognized the tune. It was the same one used in my high school song in Berkeley, California.

At Berkeley High, it was common knowledge that our school song was sung to the tune of the Cornell (not the Syracuse) alma mater. Indeed, I was aware that high schools and even colleges all over America had taken their school songs from Cornell's. Nonetheless, I was surprised to find an institution of Syracuse's stature borrowing its song from neighboring Cornell, and I said so. A senior economics professor said that Syracuse had the song first and that Cornell had been credited unfairly as its source.

When I learned the words to the Syracuse version, I added the song to my repertory of good-night songs for my daughters, Kathy and Michele. Since I had to sing song after song to get them to sleep, I was always on the lookout for an appropriately slow and soporific tune. The "Alma Mater" was easy to sing and filled the bill neatly.

There was only one problem. The words to the "Alma Mater" went

Where the vale of Onondaga
Meets the eastern sky,
Proudly stands our Alma Mater
On her hilltop high.
Flag we Love! Orange! Float for aye—
Old Syracuse, o'er thee.
May thy sons be leal and loyal
To thy memory.

Even in the days before the women's movement, the words to the next-to-last line seemed hardly appropriate to sing to one's daughters. I began to experiment with different versions and finally settled on

Loyal be thy sons and daughters,

which is the way I sang the song to my later children, Aaron, Nicholas, and Marri. Indeed, those are the words I used whenever I sang the song for the next two decades.

Over the years, I was increasingly disturbed by the official version. When the women's movement arrived, I waited expectantly for the University quietly to change words that—as the 1960s gave way to the 1970s and the 1970s to the 1980s—seemed more and more anachronistic.

I found that other members of the University community were also bothered by the line and that some of them also had adopted unofficial versions. Finally, after the 1985 Commencement, I saved the program (in which the words of the "Alma Mater" appear) and put it in my "things to do" file.

At the beginning of the fall 1985 term, I submitted a resolution to the University Senate. The Senate, which consists of faculty members, administrators, students, and staff members, does not have power over such things as the words of the "Alma Mater," so my resolution could only read that it was "the sense of the Senate" that "the 'Alma Mater' should be changed." Several committees studied the issue, queried campus and community groups, and unanimously endorsed the new wording.

So did the whole Senate, except that the body was one vote short of unanimity. When the Chancellor, who presides at Senate meetings, asked for the no votes, only one (masculine) voice was heard. I don't know whose it was. Regardless, the Chancellor sanctioned the change; the deed was at last done.

The story has a slightly ironic ending and a final footnote.

The ironic ending (note that I said "slightly") is that the first commencement at which the new words were sung—finally recognizing the University's daughters as well as its sons—was the one at which my son Nicholas graduated.

The footnote concerns the question of who had the song first, Syracuse or Cornell. I resolved this year to do a little research and try to clear up the question. I referred to the University's authorized history, *Syracuse University,* by Freeman Galpin, where I found (vol. 1, p. 177) the following:

It is . . . common knowledge that the students of those days [circa 1886] *realized they had no Alma Mater song and on several occasions earnest attempts were made to fill this pressing need. The editor of the* University News, *for example, in May 1890, deplored the dearth of Syracuse airs. Students at New Haven might thrill to "Dear Old Yale" and those at nearby Ithaca might carol "Far Above Cayuga's Waters," but as far as Syracuse was concerned, the editor declared, the campus at Syracuse was strangely silent.*

Since Cornell seemed to have its "Far Above Cayuga's Waters" when Syracuse had no song at all, it appears clear that Cornell's claim to originality is stronger than ours. But at least we can say, in 1986, that our version at last recognizes all of the University's children. And that, in my opinion, is much more important than who first had the tune.

—Dale Tussing