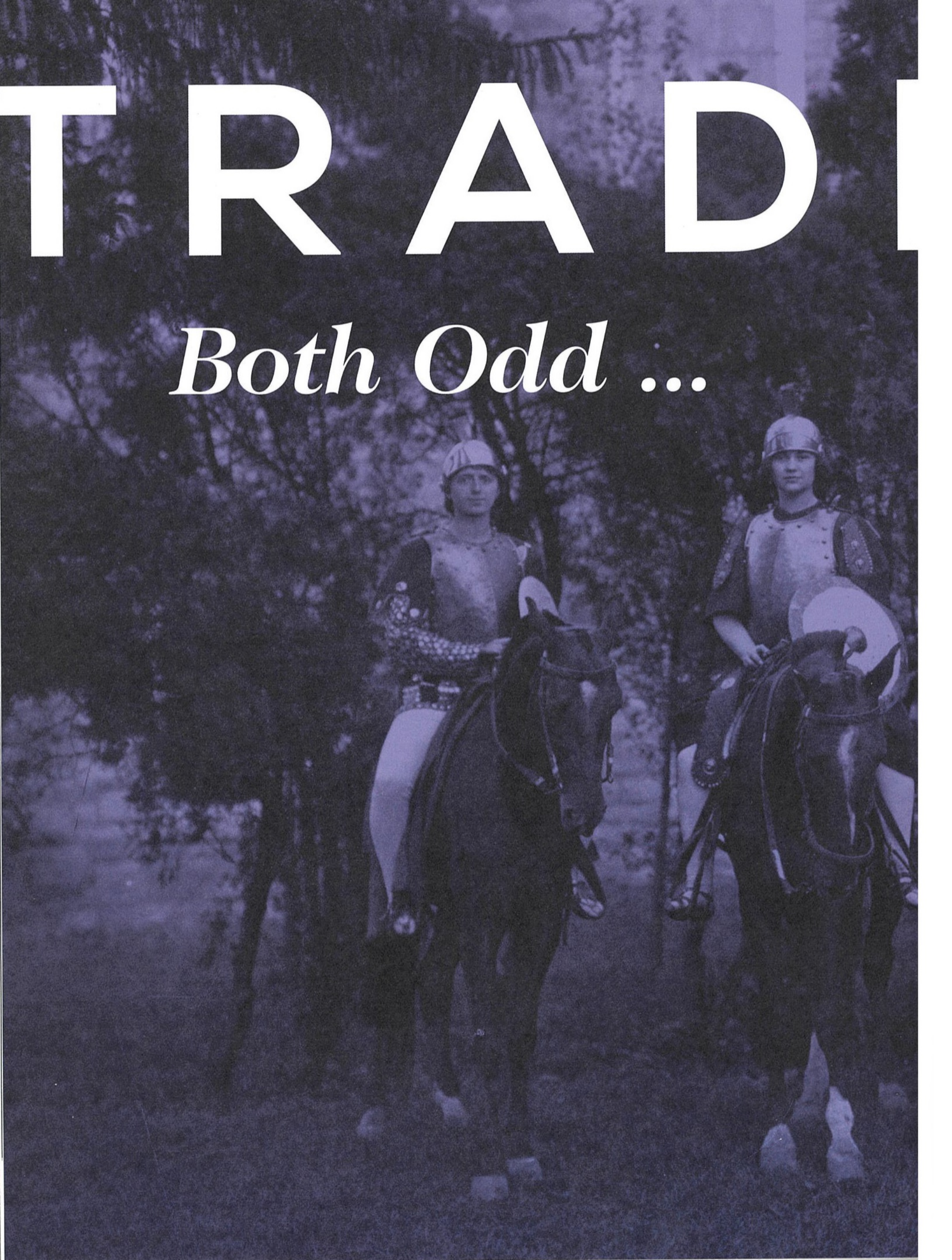


TRAD

Both Odd ...



T I O N S

and Even

By Coleen Dee Berry

Themed May Day pageants were the rage in the 1920s and 1930s at Wilson. In this 1924 photo, members of the Queen's Court are dressed as Roman soldiers.

Traditions create a college's unique identity and define the student experience. At tradition-rich Wilson, today's students carry on the College's celebrations and revel in the distinctive rituals handed down through the generations.

Wilson students no longer dance the minuet on George Washington's birthday or play Angels and Gremlins for the holidays. However, many of the existing traditions on campus can be traced back not only decades, but as long as a century ago. They've just been tweaked a bit along the way.

The century-old rivalry between the odd and even-numbered graduating years remains the foundation for many traditional events. First-year students are still presented with their class colors in a candlelit ceremony that dates back to 1905. Sophomores still carry a homemade daisy chain to graduating seniors waiting by the Conococheague on commencement morning, a ritual first noted in 1909. The alma mater (dating to the early 1920s) is still sung at ceremonies, usually with a hearty shout-out on the last line. But students also engage in a raucous, 24-hour banner-stealing competition—a modern twist on “dummy rush”—and have turned the annual May Day Queen and her court pageant into Spring Fling, which includes a campus carnival and dance.

Traditions make memories, according to Carole Ashbridge '70. “They help build these unbreakable bonds with your classmates, with the College,” she said. “You come back here for Reunion and all the memories come rushing back, and many of them have to do with the traditions. It's all tied up in what makes this a very special place.”

“Traditions are our connection to the College's legacy and bring the campus community together,” President Barbara Mistick said. “Traditions make indelible memories. It's amazing how powerful the memories of the traditions are among alumnae when they are back here for Reunion.”



Dinks, class colors and banners have long been a part of Wilson traditions.

From their first day, first-year students are immersed in Wilson traditions. They spend an orientation session becoming familiar with the most popular traditions and even have a first go at Song Wars. By mid-September, all classes are participating in Sarah Wilson Week, which includes the assignment of Bigs and Littles, banner stealing and a secret ceremony for first-years.

“What is so cool is that we have this great rivalry inside the College. Like, we will all unite in defense of Wilson, but

then we also have this great Odd/Even spirit,” said Nicole Zuleger '17, class historian and president of the Campus Activity Board (CAB).

One of the first things first-years learn during orientation is whether they are Odds or Evens, which is simple enough—it corresponds to what year they enter the school and their graduating year. This year is an Evens cycle (enter in 2016, graduate in 2020); but members of this year's senior class, who graduate in 2017, are Odds. Odds colors are red and

ODDs and EVENS is the best for sure! Fifty-four years out, many of us are still reveling in proclaiming our ODDness and EVENness!

Judy Young '63

It goes across generations.

Erin Shore '97



Today, the Class of 2020 carries on the traditions during Sarah Wilson Week.

black; Evens are green and blue.

In the 1890s, there weren't any Odds or Evens, but there were Defenders and Invincibles. The two rivals met in battle over a basketball game around Thanksgiving. The Color Ceremony began in 1905, when the seniors, carrying candles, marched from South Hall to present colors to the freshman class waiting by Laird Hall, a tradition that remains part of Sarah Wilson Week.

Another Sarah Wilson Week tradition that dates back to the early 1900s is Bigs and Littles. Littles (first-year students) are assigned Bigs (juniors) who become mentors and big sisters/brothers. In the early 1900s, these assignments were made before the Littles came to campus, and Bigs wrote to their Littles over the summer with advice on how to prepare for college life.

Bigs also present Littles with their

dinks, felt beanie caps in the appropriate Odds or Evens colors—a tradition that dates to the 1940s. The way the Bigs set the cap on their Littles' heads is how the students must wear their dinks throughout college. "I see some alumnae and staff who were Evens with their dinks, and from the way they are wearing them, I realize it's like I'm wearing the great-great-grand dink of someone, which is pretty cool," said Kirstin Lehman '18, who is the CAB traditions chair.

Zuleger's favorite tradition is Bigs and Littles. She took on six Littles in her junior year, including three little brothers. "If they are having a bad day, you try to take them to Starbucks or do something to lift their spirits. That's what makes traditions important to me—that they help make Wilson feel like home," she said. "The bonds created between Bigs and Littles can be awesome. I'm still in touch with my Big two years after graduation, and I hope to stay in touch with my Littles after I graduate."

Secrets are key part of the Wilson traditions. Odds and Evens each have their own carefully guarded ceremonies, handed down from class to class. "There's sooo much that goes on that's secret—but I can't tell you," Zuleger said with a smile.

Students pose with Odds and Evens banners at main entrance to Penn Hall, circa 1974.



Do You Know Wilson's Traditions?

Banner Stealing—This is a modern version of what was once called “dummy rush,” a tradition thought to date to the late 1880s. Each class made a dummy, which was hidden somewhere on campus, and clues were provided for the opposite class. The class who found the other’s dummy first won. The 21st-century version involves Odds and Evens banners for each class. Each banner is hidden with clues to their whereabouts posted in Lenfest Commons. Once a competing class finds and steals a banner, members leave their own clues behind about where to find it next. The back-and-forth stealing can go on into the wee hours of the night.

Step-Sing and Song Wars (began 1905)—These are friendly competitions between Odd and Even classes, where students sing and shout traditional chants toward one another. Once, classes gathered on the steps of South Hall to sing, but now the songs often take place on the main green (or in the dining hall).

Thanksgiving Dinner—Students gather in Jensen Dining Hall on the Thursday before Thanksgiving break, to be served a turkey dinner with all the trimmings (each table receives its own turkey to carve) and are waited on by staff and faculty members.

White Dinner (began 1914)—Seniors wear white to a formal dinner composed primarily of white foods to raise money for a local charity. When this event began, all the students wore white, not just seniors. Today’s legend has it that if you are not a senior and you wear white to the dinner, you risk getting something spilled on you!

The Blessing of the Animals (began 1994)—Malinda Triller Doran '96 suggested the idea when she was a student and the college chaplain agreed to hold the service if Malinda would promise to attend chapel service every week for a whole semester. Students, faculty and staff gather each spring with their pets and college animals on the green for a short service and blessing.

Muhibbah Dinner (began mid-1980s)—Muhibbah is a Malaysian word meaning “unity among nations.” The student club of the same name sponsors an international dinner/performance each year. At this spring event, students showcase food from their home countries and perform poetry, music and dances unique to their countries.

Easter Egg Hunt—This relatively modern tradition takes place at night on the campus green. The plastic eggs contain candy, as well as coupons for prizes ranging from gift cards and coffee cups to a big-ticket item, such as a flat-screen TV.

Dean's Day (first held Nov. 10, 1950)—This much-loved tradition began as President's Day. College President Paul “Prexy” Swain Havens spontaneously gave students the day off on Nov. 10, 1950, and the ensuing unplanned days off were referred to as “Prexy's Day.” Now the dean of the faculty rings the Edgar

bell to cancel one day of classes in spring to allow students to enjoy a day off before finals start.

Senior Night (began May 1980)—At the end of the school year, students choose a day to decorate their professors' classrooms. Some attempt to prevent faculty members from reaching their classrooms by barricading office doors and using various mental challenges—and maybe a water gun fight.

Spring Fling/May Day (began 1902)—This annual ritual is based on the medieval May Day celebration of spring that is historically popular at many women's colleges. The May Queen would process through campus, followed by her court. Now the elected members of the May Court, both male and female, preside over an afternoon carnival on the campus green, followed by an evening dance.

Daisy Chain (first mentioned in 1909)—Sophomores craft a chain of daisies and present the chain to the graduating class on commencement morning. The daisy chain is then placed in the Conococheague and must float away intact, or else it supposedly means bad luck for the graduating class. Members of the junior class enter the water to ensure that it floats away unbroken.

Shhhh! The Candle Club—Members of this secret club are responsible for keeping up morale on campus, and often leave messages on banners hung outside Lenfest Commons. New members are selected by outgoing Candle Club members and are inducted in a secret ceremony.

“Aunt Sarah”—Alumnae/i take on “nieces” and nephews” each year and provide them with letters of encouragement, snacks and other small gifts to keep their spirits up. Once, the identity of the Aunt Sarahs remained secret until graduation, but today it's common for the students to know their Aunt Sarah by name and correspond by email and/or phone texts. Last school year there were 155 pairings. **W**

Favorite Traditions

A survey this fall on Wilson's Facebook page asked alumnae/i to name their favorite traditions. Alums from every decade since the 1940s responded!

Thanks to those who participated.

THE TOP FAVORITES WERE:

Odds and Evens

White Dinner

Bigs and Littles

Sarah Wilson Week