

# Ask Geoff

By Geoff Williams, University at Albany Archivist

In this installment of “Ask Geoff,” I thought it might be nice to look back – and ahead – at some favorite UAlbany traditions, such as Alumni Reunion/Homecoming.

The earliest recorded Alumni Reunion took place in 1851 – two years after the founding of the New York State Normal School’s “Association of Alumni.” In the 19th century, reunions were few and often far between, usually held between Christmas and New Year’s, but, towards the end of the century, they were moved to May or June. By the 20th century, reunion was fixed at the end of the school year, and coincided with both Senior Week and Commencement. The festivities often included skits performed by both students and graduates. The photo to the right, for instance, shows the Class of 1911, at its fifth reunion in 1916, performing a skit as Henry Ford’s Peace Ship.

With the move to the uptown campus in 1966, the graduating classes became too large to hold an Alumni Reunion at the same time Commencement was scheduled, and reunion was moved back to June.



Photo gift of Ester Woodward '11, Alumni Memorabilia Collection



These musicians, pictured in the 1955 *Pedagogue*, provided some of the entertainment at Homecoming 1954.



This 1963 Campus Queen Homecoming Parade photo was published in the 1964 *Torch*.

The first Homecoming was held a little over 100 years after the first Alumni Reunion. Homecoming began very informally, on Oct. 31, 1953, when the Class of 1954 seniors invited graduates of the classes of 1951-53 to return to campus for a soccer game, punch party and dance. Unfortunately, no photos of that event have been found. (If you have one, I'd appreciate your sharing it with me.) In 1953, soccer was in its first season as an intercollegiate sport, and it would be the big fall sport until the introduction of football in 1970. By 1954, Homecoming had also acquired musical accompaniment, as you can see from the photo at the bottom of the opposite page. Within the next few years, Homecoming would feature parades, floats (at right, note the award-winning 1958 Beta Zeta Sputnik-era float from the 1959 *Pedagogue*), and Campus Queen contests.

The Campus Queen contests disappeared in the 1970s, and Homecoming activities centered on the University's new football team. Alumni Reunion continued in June, with the unfortunate effect that it became disconnected from any contact with current students. But, after the



reunion in June 2007, the decision was made to combine Homecoming and Alumni Reunion during Homecoming Weekend each fall. That back-to-the-future move revived the old tradition of holding Alumni Reunions when students were on campus so that graduates from five, 10, 15, 20 and 25 years prior could enjoy special Homecoming/Reunion events that would include future alumni, as well.

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