

Class of 1943 History

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Our class has a very unusual history. Most of our class entered Franklin & Marshall College in September 1939, while some of us entered in September 1940 - as the class of 1944. Due to pressures of an accelerated academic program during the early war years of World War II, a few of us graduated in 1942, a substantial number of us managed to graduate in January and in June of 1943. Others had their college career interrupted by calls to military duty. Some returned to complete their college courses in the post-war years. Some never came back.

Our early years started on a high note. The first football game of the 1940 season saw the Diplomats defeat a Dartmouth team that later went on to defeat Cornell – the number one team in the nation that year. Those were glory days for F&M football. Much of the success was owed to the gridiron talents of tackle Alex Shibanoff, later named a “Little All-American.” The whole 1940 team is in the F&M Athletic Hall of Fame.

Freshman hazing regulations were in full swing. We had to wear dinks (little blue beanie caps), large green bow ties, and pants rolled up to expose white socks. We could discard this gaudy attire if F&M won the Thanksgiving game with Gettysburg; if not, we were stuck with this silly costume until Christmas. Among other rituals, freshmen could be challenged by any upperclassman to stop and sing the college anthem. Or, respond to the question: “What happened when an F&M student at the bottom of his class transferred to Gettysburg?” (The proper answer: “He raised the scholastic average of both schools.”)

An autumnal rite of passage was the notorious “pajama parade.” Freshmen were required to show up clad only in their night wear. Girls would line the sidewalk, and the freshmen needed to kiss the girls as they passed. After a pep rally and a scramble down a gauntlet lined by paddle-wielding sophomores, the motley crew marched to the Colonial Theatre in downtown Lancaster. A 10 pm freshmen curfew was enforced by the Druids, a black-hatted band of ruthless sophomores. The war changed all of this as the college took on a more serious note. Freshman hazing was abandoned (all for the better).

One after another student received in the mail a large white envelope containing “greetings” from the President of the United States, informing him that his service was required in the armed forces. More than a few students chose to voluntarily enlist. The class began to shrink. From an entering class of 331, only 189 graduated in 1943.

Course loads burgeoned, and additional classes were offered in summer sessions. Many students thereby accumulated sufficient credits to graduate in three calendar years instead of the customary four.

Three innovations kept the college afloat during the war years. One was to breach the all-male tradition by allowing women to enroll in courses for credit. Another was President

Distler's offer to make available the College's facilities to the military, including a Naval Officer training program and a pre-flight school. Third was a government provision for qualified pre-medical and pre-dental students to be commissioned as reserve officers in the Army or Navy, thus exempt from the draft.

Tribute to the success of our Class of 1943 is due to the devotion of an outstanding College faculty and administration during these unsettling war years.

A consequence is that our class has traditionally been credited with a substantially greater participation in Alumni Giving campaigns, peaking at 80% on the occasion of our 60th Reunion in 2003. Cumulatively, we have donated to the college a total of \$9,598,400. Hail, Nevonian!