

2017

UA1F WKU Spirit & Symbols

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WKU Archives WKU Spirit & Symbols

These and other sources are available in the [Harrison-Baird Reading Room](#) in the Kentucky Building.

[Big Red](#)

[Logos & Marks](#)

[School Colors](#)

General articles and books:

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[Monroe, Keith. "Students Not Always Hilltoppers," *College Heights Herald*, Sept. 9, 1966.](#)

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"Logos Connect the Past , Present," March 4, 2001.

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UA2/1 Board of Regents meeting minutes,

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UA19/9 Mascots - collection inventory

UA77/1 "The Story of the Red Towel," *Alumni*, Winter 1993.

UA94/6/2/2 Edgar Stansbury - Red Towel

Timeline:

1927 - Nov. - First homecoming invited alumni home to the "Hilltop"

1928 - Jan. - Hilltopper first used in *College Heights Herald*

Nov. - Hilltoppers first used in *College Heights Herald*

Talisman yearbook - basketball team first called Hilltoppers

1929 - *Talisman* yearbook - team photos with Hilltopper on uniform

1966 - students switch from confederate flag to red towel

1979 - Dec. 1 - Big Red delivered to fans in Diddle Arena.

Announces New Mascot

Western may have a new mascot as the "Big Red Machine" comes alive. Taking last season's slogan one step farther, a mechanical personality named "Big Red" might become the first mascot.

The "Big Red Machine" would only be a mascot and would not replace the name Hilltoppers.

The technique of a mascot being different from the team's name is also used by such schools as Auburn, Ga., Tech and Purdue.

According to Ron Beck in the student affairs office, previous contests to design an image or caricature of a Hilltopper for use as a trademark have been unsatisfactory. Initial responses from Western's cheerleaders, several faculty members and other interested students indicate that "Big Red" could be the answer to Western's "identity crisis." --A chrome head with rotating, Computer-type reels for eyes.

Wanted: Appropriate Character Symbolizing Western Hilltopper

Currently, a topic of much student attention is a character to symbolize the Western Hilltopper.

Pouring forth from the idle pens of hundreds of Westernites is a seemingly endless cavalcade of shapes and designs.

Subject matter ranges from formless "schmoos" to eagles clutching scrolls lauding "home" and mother."

Some of these caricatures are fairly good and cleverly executed. Their only problem is that they fail to relate directly to Western Kentucky University.

What I mean is this. Take the most intelligent Kentuckian, educate him to the Ph.D. level in a field such as Thermo Dynamics or Egyptology, outfit him in a wardrobe of Botany 500 and send him up to New York.

Within his first hour in the big city, some bum would call him a hillbilly.

Why Not a Hillbilly?

Let us start our search for a school symbol from this point of realization. Why not a hillbilly? There's nobody on our basketball team that looks like an eagle!

The basic character of the Kentucky "woodland gentleman" is an American legacy. Strong of body and with a determination of iron, he cleared this land and created an agrarian paradise.

Not satisfied with this titantic accomplishment, he picked up his long rifle and marched across the great plains, following the setting sun to even greater glories.

Brave men learned to fear him at places like Gettysburg, Chickamauga and Shiloh. Even in defeat his indomitable faith and pride delivered him victory.

Most important to us is that this giant of American history was our forefather; his blood flows in our veins today.

There's something rather good neighborly about this symbol as well.

When those sophisticated basketball teams venture down here to the sticks -- to get beat like a damn drum -- it'll give 'em something to make fun of on the way home.

Students Not Always Hilltoppers

Western used to be downtown, but 75 years ago the students packed it up, moved it up the Hill and came to be known as Hilltoppers.

When Western and Eastern Kentucky universities were legislated into existence in 1906, Western Kentucky State Normal School was a school for teachers. The two-year institution required no high school diploma for admission because very few students had them, said university historian Dr. Lowell Harrison.

Harrison, who recently completed a book of Western's history, said the study was interesting and sometimes funny.

Harrison spent most of his school years on the Hill, graduating from Western Kentucky State College, College Heights High and the nearby elementary school.

"I still remember seeing President (Henry Hardin) Cherry in chapel," Harrison said. "They used to march the little kids up the Hill from the training school when they thought they had something we should see."

That hill, 322 feet above the Barren River, was College Heights Hill, at the top of College Street. But Western was below the Hill for five years before moving to the Heights.

Western's campus was originally where the Bowling Green Towers are now on College Street. Four years later, in 1910, the school had outgrown its facilities and had to decide -- move the campus to the Hill or out to the west side of the city to a flatter section known as Covington Woods.

"Covington Woods was a definite possibility," Harrison said. "I don't know what the Hilltoppers would have been called then -- maybe the Flatlanders."

But the Flatlanders never came to be. President Cherry was in a hurry to move to a larger campus. A move to Covington Woods would mean building a college from scratch. But on the Hill were two large buildings that were part of the Potter College for Young Ladies, which had closed in 1909.

President Cherry decided the two buildings could be put to immediate use. So Western decided to move up the Hill and start building an auditorium to be named Van Meter.

The official move up the Hill was not to be until the completion of Van Meter. But, tradition says, President Cherry became so impatient, the school moved Feb. 4, 1911, several days before the front doors were finished.

Harrison has several pictures of students lining the streets, packing boxes and moving the school equipment -- books, globes, and chalkboards.

English teacher Gordon Wilson, the namesake of Gordon Wilson Hall, reportedly overloaded a wagon with library books and had to travel around the Hill and up State Street so the horses could pull the heavy load to the new campus.

The "Hilltopper" nickname first surfaced in the early '20's and anyone seeing the Hill could easily understand why the name appeared on uniforms in 1925.

In 1930 the name was changed to Western Kentucky Teachers College. Western was still thought of as a teachers college several years after the name was changed to Western Kentucky State College in 1948.

The Hilltopper teams, after flourishing on the Hill for more than 40 years under the direction of Coach E.A. Diddle, made another major move in 1963 -- down the Hill to Diddle Arena.

The Kentucky Legislature promoted Western and Eastern to university status in 1966.

Western now encompasses almost 1,000 acres with more than 66 major buildings. It offers more than 140 academic majors and minors. And yet after these generations of change "the Hill" remains part of every Westerners vocabulary.

And what more fitting way to top the Hill than with a statue of the man who 75 years ago decided to take his ideas of higher education and go up the Hill?

Email Correspondence Between Paul Just & Edgar Stansbury, 2005.

From: Paul Just

To: Ed Stansbury

Sent: Tuesday, May 31, 2005, 1:35 PM

Subject: help!

Colonel have a question for you as you know, we have copies of the photos of the "first" Western uniform to use the nickname "Hilltoppers" -- one or two group pictures and the one with Ted [Hornback] alone I am tryin got determine when that uniform was first worn? our information indicates that the "Hilltopper" nickname was first used during the 1925-26 season (where the idea came from; how much it was used, and by whom, I do not know) but, when I stumbled across the pic of Ted in the uniform maybe 20 years ago (+/-), I took it to him and he gave me the following story (which I paraphrase here from my sometimes vague, and sometimes wandering, memory):

Ted told the story something along these lines "we had been beaten badly by Vanderbilt and were scheduled to play them again that season. Coach Diddle told us that if [we] beat them this time, he would be sure that we got new uniforms. Well, we wond that game and then kept reminding him that he owed us new uniforms. One day I was in Coach's office when they delivered some boxes. Coach opened them up and there were our new uniforms. He pulled min[e] out and asked me to try it on. That's when the picture was shot."

Now that's how I remember the story he related to me those many years ago. When was that? Our records indicate that we played Vanderbilt in only Ted's freshman ('25-26 -- one time, a 34-29 win at home) and sophomore ('26-27) seasons in that '26-27 season, we lost BIG to Vandy (40-20) at home on January 8 and then turned around and beat them in Nashville (26-25) ten days later (Jan. 18) common sense tells me that has to be the situation with Vandy that Ted was referring to now, my guess is that the "new" uniforms that Mr. Diddle ordered did not arrive in time to be used during the remainder of the '26-27

season (although, the posed picture with Ted in that uniform I suppose could have been shot during the late winter or spring of 1927)????

My assumption is that the uniforms were first worn during the 1927-28 season (and beyond, I guess)??? BUT, basketball athletes are not pictured in the uniforms in the Talisman until the 1929 edition could it be that the uniforms arrived in late 1927, maybe even after the season started and were worn in competition, but did not arrive until after the team picture was made for the 1928 Talisman?????

Any thoughts or recollections you can share to help me pin this down??? as always, thanks for any assistance you can provide

paul j

From: Ed Stansbury

To: Paul Just

The B/B jersey you are talking about is the only one I ever knew about during my B/B playing days. Ted's story makes sense, and in all likely hood [sic] that is the way it happened. It has be[e]n my experience if something makes sense it is likely to be true. It depicts the way Mr. Diddle did business. For instance -- if a new player came along with feet larger than the shoes available, he would call Herman Lowe at the down [town] sport[s] store request he bring some pairs larger than the last one he had bought. Paul you should know by now, after reviewing how things were done in those early days any thing is likely to have happened, and it did -- and little or no record of it. It is unlikely that anyone is going to thank you for trying to document some of these early happenings. Stay with it. History is important, even if it is only about athletics. ed

Subject: Re: help!

From: Paul Just

Date: Wed, 01 Jun 2005 14:13:23

To: Edgar Stansbury

Colonel thanks for your thoughts, especially your comment that "It depicts the way Mr. Diddle did business." -- that goes a long way toward being strong "circumstantial" evidence and, based on your comment that "The B/B jersey you are talking about is the only one I ever knew about during my B/B playing days." my "educated (?) guess" is that those uniforms were probably first worn during your first varsity season, which I believe was '27-28 -- that all seems to fall into place and, it fits in with my feelings on [why] the team pic did not feature those uniforms until the '28-29 team in the 1929 Talisman (see my earlier comments below)

thanks again and take care!!! paul j.