With Age Comes Appreciation

Six members of the Class of 1934 attended their 65th reunion last October during the Alumni Association's Reunion Weekend. The occasion prompted 87-year-old George J. Heideman '34 CBA of Ligonier, Pa., to recall memorable times at the University of Illinois amid the Great Depression. May the stories of those who came before us and the lessons that lie therein never fade.

- The Editor

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I finished Huntley (Ill.) High School in June 1930, just as the Depression was setting in. My father owned an 80-acre dairy farm in McHenry County, upon which my brother and six sisters grew up. I took the county examination and won a four-year scholarship, then worth $25 per semester ($35 out-of-state). Although I had passed the state's teachers examination when a senior, I looked so young that no school board was willing to pay $45 per month for my services. So I, along with two classmates, decided to go to Illinois.

One of my classmates had a hobby of playing around with derelict Model T Fords, and we used one to head south to Champaign in September. The car had no top, no hood cover, had to be hand-cranked and had hard rubber tires. The three of us rented rooms at 909 S. Sixth St. from Mrs. Hodges for $9 per month, which included the privilege of parking the T in the back yard. Although during the spring 'riot' of 1931, the T was picked up and pushed several blocks to where it was overturned on the porch of a sorority house and from whence we reclaimed it, little worse for wear.

With the help of the scholarship, waiting tables, doing janitorial work at the Commerce Building, etc., I successfully made it through school, accumulating 144 credit hours with majors in accountancy and insurance, and earning Beta Gamma Sigma and Bronze Tablet honors. I bought used textbooks for $2 or $3 each. And I believe I did have to pay $20 for my diploma, but as a junior I had won $100 prize in an essay contest. I worked summers on my father's farm, for which I received $50 and a new suit.

When the banks were closed in 1933, my bank account balance was $4.33.

I had little time nor money for recreation, but I was a regular contributor to the Campus Scout humor column in The Daily Illini. Back then they awarded two free passes to the movies for the best contributions, which I won frequently and so was able to take a date to the movies. And Cokes at Prehn's were either a nickel or a dime. This was back in the days of Scotty Reston '32 COM, and The Daily Illini was an excellent paper.

Job prospects were very, very few in the spring of 1934, but I worked hard on it. I was also very lucky. When I graduated, I had accepted three jobs. I worked for Armour and Company in the Chicago stockyards from June through September, doing stenographic work for $22 a week while waiting for an opening in the accounting department. I had also accepted a position with Arthur Andersen & Co. at $90 per month, but that would not start until October.

Then, on graduation day, because I was delayed from heading home because I received the wrong diploma and had to go to the Administration Building to get mine, a telephone call from Professor Hiram T. Scovill (who was head of the accountancy department) caught up with me. He asked if I might be interested in a spot as an assistant in accounting at Yale University, starting in September. Had this call not caught up with me, it might very well have been directed to another accounting classmate. My mixed-up diploma most likely changed my entire life thereafter.

So I went to work in the Chicago stockyards in June, resigned in September, got a leave of absence from Arthur Andersen & Co., and went to Yale, where I received $600 as an assistant the first year and $1,200 the second year when I had some additional duties as an instructor. I left Yale in 1936 and went to work in the New York office of Arthur Andersen & Co. Thus, I actually worked at all the jobs I had accepted at the time of my graduation in 1934.

I did not realize at the time I graduated how fortunate I was to have gone to the University of Illinois, and I subsequently had contacts with many influential and successful graduates. At Yale, Ralph C. Jones '22 CBA, MS '23 CBA, headed the accountancy department, assisted by Andrew Barr '23 CBA, MS '24 CBA, HON '90. Jones remained at Yale until his retirement. Barr, after an interesting and outstanding (and dangerous) experience with the Fourth Armored Division in World War II, became chief accountant for a number of years with the Securities and Exchange Commission in Washington, D.C.

The U of I was a wonderful experience for which I have always been grateful. It gave me a sound, quality education without which I could not have experienced such an enjoyable, as well as successful, life.

It has served me well for 65 years.

—George J. Heideman