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History of Homecoming
1948-2003

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Homecoming
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A Brief Synopsis

This paper is a labor of love. I wanted to literally beat my computer while I was trying to put the information that I had researched into essay form. This was probably one of the most difficult papers that I have ever had to research or write about due to the fact that I had to spend time in the College Archives digging for information and even then only finding a tip of the iceberg.

I started the paper by introducing “Homecoming” as a term that can be found in Webster’s Dictionary, something that everyone can relate to. Then I ease into talking about the first homecoming on the Brockport campus, which was held in 1948 under President Donald M. Tower. As early as 1931 ex-basketball players were returning for a one-night get-together and game with the Varsity basketball team. This started to become an annual event and was enhanced in 1943 when the Class of 1942 held a reunion. As the years went on more events were added until finally the official title of Homecoming was given to the proceedings.

The next several paragraphs were about the following six decades after the first homecoming event. The 1950’s were relatively quiet, by quiet I mean that homecoming was successful, as well as the early 1960’s but as they came to a close and the 1970’s were emerging there was a shift in enthusiasm. Meaning that there was no interest in homecoming on the Brockport campus at all. The reason for this could have been that there were more pressing issues in the world that could have taken precedence over
I. INTRODUCTION

Homecoming is that cyclical event that rears its head at the end of each October for festivities to delight the masses; a time of celebration to unite the past and present through traditional activities. SUNY Brockport is no different. Annually, since 1948, crowds assemble for the parade, alumni return to Welcome receptions, and new students are invited to take their first taste of a traditional college campus.

Homecoming has meant many things to many people through the years on this campus. When the word is mentioned terms like parades, football games, and dances might proceed through your head. Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary describes “Homecoming” so well: “the return of a group of people usually on a special occasion to a place formerly frequented or regarded as home; especially an annual celebration for alumni at a college or university.”

I have chosen to break this project into the six different decades that Homecoming existed to show how it evolved over time. It is important to explore the origins of Homecoming on the SUNY Brockport campus so that it is possible to understand how the event has evolved over six decades.
II. THE PAST

SUNY Brockport's Homecoming can be represented by six separate era's in time that symbolized the different values and beliefs of the people who lived during them. Many factors contributed to Homecomings constant evolution through time. In order to see this procession we must start at the very beginning. It was during the presidency of Donald M. Tower that the first homecoming was held in the fall of 1948. This was a time in Brockport's history when great changes overtook the campus. Under Tower Brockport's enrollment rose from 300 to over 2,500, health and physical education were added to the curriculum, permanent dormitory residences were starting to emerge, and homecoming became official. ¹

The social life of a typical Brockport student was starting to pick up in the late 1940's and early 1950's. This lead to the creation of something that was considered extremely sociable, Homecoming. Interestingly enough, activities that were usually associated with Homecoming were forerunners of the 1948 origin. As early as 1931 ex-basketball players were returning for a "one-night get-together and game with the Varsity basketball team."³ This started to become an annual event and was enhanced in 1943 when the Class of 1942, which was the first 4-year college class, held a reunion.⁴ As the years went on, other graduated classes became involved in reunion events until the proceedings grew so large that they were officially titled "Homecoming" and the custom expanded to include, receptions, football and soccer games, buffet suppers, and a dance.⁵ Thus a tradition was born in Brockport. A tiny bundle of joy that began as something

² Dedman, Cherishing This Heritage: Chapter Thirteen, 260.
³ Dedman, Cherishing This Heritage: Chapter Thirteen, 275.
⁴ Dedman, Cherishing This Heritage: Chapter Thirteen, 275.
⁵ Dedman, Cherishing This Heritage: Chapter Thirteen, 275.
simple that grew into what Homecoming means today. Although many aspects of that first Homecoming still hold true today, slight changes occurred over the six decades of its existence.

A closer look at the 1950’s will show us the humble beginning of Homecoming as an event. During this decade the Alumni Association was in charge of planning Homecoming. It was not only responsible for informing the current students about the occasion but also the graduated students who now lived across the United States. There were plans made for a dinner, dance, parade, coffee hour, and the football game would highlight the day’s program. In 1956 people lined Main Street for the float parade and crowds swelled the soccer and football stands. As one witness to the event noted, “the parade began by the canal and the reviewing stand was on Main St...” Pictures from the Homecoming Dance in 1955 indicate that it was a formal affair due to the shirt and ties worn by the men and dresses worn by the women.

It also seemed during the ’50’s that a formal welcome to the alumni was very important. Most activities centered on them. Awards were given to the largest returning group of alumni and in 1956 the Class of 1955 won the first annual Homecoming class trophy. The focal point for Homecoming to alumni was pride. If you had pride in your alma mater you would come back for this event and show school spirit.

The 1950’s were the years that themes for Homecoming first started to appear, for example in 1959 “Disney Land” was the theme. Also in 1959 we see again that a

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6 The Stylus, October 24, 1952, 1.
8 Interview with Rosie Rich, oral history, college archives.
dinner, dance, parade, and game were planned as part of the big day. As the decade came to a close it can be seen throughout the time that the event was officially called Homecoming, the alumni were instrumental in participation, and the activities that surrounded Homecoming were practically identical. But would this hold true in the following decade?

In the 1960's social life on the Brockport campus stayed consistent with the past decade. The affair was still being billed as Homecoming and themes were still a major part of the dance and parade; for example, in 1960 the theme was “Music in the Air.” One difference between this decade and the 1950's was that each dorm was assigned the task of creating their own float along with decorating the outside of their building. This change was significant because now Homecoming activities began with dorm judging instead of the parade.

The Alumni Association was still in charge of making Homecoming happen. Football and soccer battled it out to see who would pull in more fans at their games and in 1960, both teams were at home. However, the most interesting point about the 1960's was that they began with as much spirit and pride as one could surmise from pictures taken and articles written from that time. Photos from 1966 indicated elaborate floats were created in honor of the Homecoming parade and newspaper articles depicted glowing reviews describing turnouts for events. However, as they 1960's drew to a close Homecoming on the Brockport campus was about to suffer through one of its biggest
changes, hardly any mention of the event at all by the end of the decade. How could this be possible? How could a turn around ensue this quickly? No formal research or investigation into this matter has been performed but there are a few logical explanations I can offer on the matter.

The lack of information found about Homecoming in the 1970’s is a direct cause of the social life represented on campus in that period of time. On college campuses country wide school spirit and homecoming activities were taking a back seat to the global issues that our culture was facing. Issues such as the discomfort of the Vietnam War finally reached the Brockport campus. In an interview with Larry Crawford, a former Brockport student, he stated that there was some protesting on the Brockport campus but not as much as other schools, such as the University of Rochester. Brockport’s efforts for anti-war protesting was minimal compared to other larger campuses but were still present. Crawford also stated that he could not even remember Homecoming during his years here. He mentioned that Spring-In stood out in his mind more than Homecoming events, which made me wonder if it was possible that more money was put into Spring-In and therefore not enough was left over to fund Homecoming?

Not only were anti-war protests spreading over campus but other issues as well were a cause for alarm. For example, the Kent State Massacre got students involved in protesting, along with the abortion matter and the legalization of marijuana.

The main change of this era versus the other decades that came before it was that students on the Brockport campus did not care about supporting their school or showing

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17 Crawford, Larry, interviewed by the author, 10 December 2003.
18 Crawford, Larry, interviewed by the author, 10 December 2003.
school spirit. They were highly motivated by the issues that the entire world faced and not Homecoming in a small town in upstate New York. This apathy resulted in low reunion numbers for the classes in the 1970's. Mr. Crawford stated that he never attended one alumni benefit event or Homecoming after he left Brockport.

As the 1970's drew to a close Brockport Homecoming was about to undergo another change. It was at this time that resurgence in campus pride arose around the school. In 1982, Homecoming was back on the front page of The Stylus detailing how successful the weekend had been. Themes became a part of Homecoming again with "Wild, Wild West" being the concept in 1981.

New activities were added to the weekend festivities as well. In 1981, a raft race on the canal was organized along with a bonfire and wine tasting, while the Brockport Symphony Orchestra serenaded the guests was added to the program. And again in 1982 a bonfire and a prep-rally were scheduled on Friday night, preceding the football game on Saturday afternoon.

An interesting point in the 1980's was that in 1984 there was a slight controversy about the football game. By this time in Brockport's history of Homecomings, soccer and football had officially ended their battle of who gets more fans due to the fact that football became a much bigger phenomenon on campus. But that year no football game was scheduled during the Homecoming weekend due to religious holidays and agenda conflicts with midterm exams. It was announced that the soccer game would take place.

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23 The Stylus. September 19, 1984, 1.
football’s place. Not only was it a soccer game but it would be the women’s soccer game featured during Homecoming. News of this change spread through campus quickly and became front-page news in *The Stylus*. Hardly anyone supported this change in events as shown by the many complaints that were made by students and parents.

Although no protesting or demonstrations took place by students, the college still felt the pressure of how the lack of a football game angered the campus and as a direct result the college promised that the schedule would be fixed for the following year’s events.

It was also during the 1980’s that the title of Homecoming was given a face-lift. By 1985 the weekend was starting to be dubbed “Homecoming and Parents Weekend.” The Alumni Association was still in charge of planning the events but now the focus shifted from centering on returning students to the parents of current students. For example, in 1986 a formal letter enticing parents and alumni to come to Homecoming went out as well as a brochure to welcome them to the festivities.

Another change that occurred in the 1980’s was the first mention of registration for parents and alumni. What this meant was that parents or alumni who choose to come to Homecoming must check-in with the college and if needed they would be given a place to stay on campus. This seemed particularly interesting because if desired, parents/alumni could have a room in the dorms, which was something that was not done up until that point.

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As the 1990's began the event was still known as “Homecoming and Parents Weekend.” But with this new decade came more changes and these changes occurred to help bring more interest to Homecoming in Brockport. They included a men’s alumni soccer game, which started in the later half of the decade.30

Another change was how Homecoming in 1990 planned on not only celebrating the pride there was in the college but also the diversity that the college represented.31 It was the planning committee’s hope that students would embrace the idea that the main force behind pride was different people coming together to celebrate what they have in common.32 That commonality was everyone attended the same school and should believe in their higher educational institute. This idea fizzled and proved to be another failed attempt to capture interest. The parade, football game, and dance were still being offered as merriment for students to participate in.

Despite the attempt to change participation in Homecoming, Brockport sailed through another decade without much mention of it. Numbers for alumni returning were not high, inclusion of the parents did not bring more attention to the event as it was hoped, and undergraduate participation was extremely low. Things were so dismal that in 1998 an editorial was written about the lack of participation in The Stylus. The column stated that in spite of best efforts put forth by the Alumni Association to create a truly unique experience, involvement was minimal and when the campus should be in the midst of celebration instead no one seemed to care.33 The author called for people to

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break the cycle of resistance and participate in Homecoming.\footnote{The Stylus, October 7, 1998, 7.} In a final thought, the person responsible for the article begged students to change and come out and support the college and urged that they should take pride in their school.\footnote{The Stylus, October 7, 1998, 7.}
III. RECENT YEARS

As the millennium approached Brockport took on a new name for Homecoming, “Homecoming and Family Weekend” a change from past decades and that title remains constant until this day. Since the inauguration of President Paul Yu things have looked slightly different here on campus around Homecoming time. His “back to the future” idea has brought out more students to help celebrate Homecoming.

Part of Yu’s campaign included “Eagle Fest” in 2003, which served as a pep-rally on the Friday night before the football game. The football team was honored at this event by allowing the three captains to ascend the stage and give their thoughts about the year to come. Not only was the football team mentioned but the other fall sports teams were credited as well. Also included at this event were a cookout, a bonfire, and a speech given by the Athletic Director, Lynn Case.

Although staggered in numbers alumni still come back to support their alma mater. Reunions still take place for five, ten, and twenty years. Reunions of twenty-five years or more were shifted to the summer but after many years they are now being folded back into Homecoming in 2004.

The new century saw more changes to the Homecoming lineup of activities as well. There were still parades and football games but numbers for the dances have decreased new and other exciting opportunities have presented themselves. In 2001, comedian Jon Stewart came to Brockport as part of Homecoming weekend, something that had never been done on the Brockport campus and in 2003; Sinbad was the comedian who made many Brockport students laugh. These are extremely important points as to follow the evolution of Brockport’s Homecoming. These alterations had to
occur to keep up with the changing times so that the tradition of Homecoming would continue to be a large event on campus. The planning committee finally realized that in order to get interest in Homecoming events they must present activities that will be entertaining to its students.
IV. THE FUTURE

What is in the future for Brockport's Homecoming? If it continues along the same trends as it has over the past six decades then it would be safe to surmise that Homecoming will keep changing with the times to keep students interested.

Reunions will see a change in the years to come due to the fact that the focus will now be placed back upon them. In the beginning, returning students were a focal point during Homecoming but as the years went on the difference classes were just given a buffet-styled dinner but it is the hope of the college to change that. Also in previous years the reunions took place under the class that they graduated in. For example, if you graduated in 1987 then you would be considered a part of the Class of 1987. However, as time went on defining classes got a little harder and that is why the college is proposing to have reunions according to what major they graduated with or organization they participated in. For example, if you graduated in 2001 with a major in History then you would be considered as a part of the History department alumni. This new trend is supposedly going to be put into effect as soon as the Fall of 2004.

There are some things however that will never change. There will always be a football game and the parade to attend. The point is that Homecoming should be a mixture of alumni and undergraduates producing a living, memorable occasion. That is one thing that I have learned about researching Homecoming. It is not about bringing one group of people together merely to remember but it is about connecting past to present to reflect on where the college came from and where it is going.
V. CONCLUSION

It is so important to realize where Homecoming started and where Homecoming is today. This leap that slowly evolved over six decades took Brockport on an incredible journey but hardly a perfect one. It will never be perfect because there will always be changing views and beliefs of students on campus that the planning committee must adhere to. That is why evolution is inevitable, the change of time forces change in Homecoming. What got students involved and interested in 1958 is not the same interest that roused students in 1998. Evolution is not only inevitable because of change but also because Homecoming is a part of the national collegiate culture and thus an expectation of students. That is why through each decade there is a change, no matter how remote, that is evident. Researching Brockport’s Homecoming gave me the opportunity to learn that time forces change. Without that change Homecoming would have been forced to become a stagnant inconvenience the campus would have to deal with each fall but instead it is something that our college takes great pride in.

Homecoming has made its mark here on the SUNY Brockport campus. From soccer games to football games and Parents Weekend to Family Weekend, change has been an ever-present amenity on this College’s grounds. Homecoming’s first introduction to this town and college is one of the strongest forces behind its bright future. The traditional sense of Homecoming pushes for its continuation. A return to the old ways is something that President Yu would like to put into action. This “back to the future” philosophy is what this college, and most likely every college in the nation, needs. A sense of tradition and pride in one’s higher education is what helps the
celebration of the spirit of homecoming. Remember, the memories that we make today are the reminiscences of tomorrow.
Bibliographic Essay

This was the first research paper where I could not just look information up in a book in the library or run a search on the Internet. For this area of study I had to dig deep into the College Archives and even then I still was only blessed with a limited amount of sources with useful information.

The Alumni News is a collection of articles written by the Alumni Association. They are records of students from the past and pieces of writing about events that the association has been involved in. This collection can be found in the College Archives located in the bottom of Drake Memorial Library. These articles greatly helped me in my quest. These pieces of writing offered me insightful details about the returning classes that attended homecoming events. It presented information about how they organized homecoming and how they sought to bring about interest in homecoming for graduates.

Another source that helped my research process immensely was The Stylus. Also found in the College Archives this source represented a collection of articles from the school newspaper. They beefed up my paper so I could add details about events surrounding homecoming, the number of people that attended those events, and other undergraduate information.

It was also interesting to see what types of things that were important to publish in 1952 all the way up until 1998. For example, in 1952 it was noted that “Homecoming” was a complete success and through the years support staggered but started perking back up in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s.
The information that I choose to report on spanned six decades. That is a lot of data to shift through. In order to better familiarize myself with these different eras was to look at other articles in the archives, specifically the snap shot binders, *The Stylus*, and Alumni News articles. Snap shot binders, as I call them, were binders full of articles and pictures of events that took place on the SUNY Brockport campus that were originally published in other media in the area. Looking up related events that happened in these decades helped me capture the mood surrounding Homecoming as an event on the Brockport campus.

My advice for the person who wishes to tackle this subject after me is to conduct as many interviews as they can. Talk to people from the different decades that were present here on campus during Homecoming events. Also ask faculty or other administrative members their views or ideas on the matter. I also suggest looking into other newspaper articles, such as the *Democrat and Chronicle* to see if SUNY Brockport’s Homecoming was ever mentioned in other publications than *The Stylus*. 
Bibliography

Homecoming

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