

tones of Seniors, Juniors, Sophs and Freshies,” the Blue and Gold yearbook reported that first year, “each of whom imagines he possesses a God-given knowledge of time and tune.”⁵

Could town and gown conflicts be far off?

“The cold nights are not sufficient to dampen the spirits of the students whose songs may be heard way into the small hours as they patrol the streets,” the *Berkeley Advocate* reported a few years later. “Some of the residents of the town are frequently annoyed by the impossibility of sleep during the time which the caroling bands spend in their vicinity.”⁶

Singing wasn’t the worst of it. For fun, students would occasionally storm a vaudeville theater or flood roadways by opening water tanks alongside rail tracks. The worst offenders, according to the *Occident*, which proclaimed itself an “anti-fraternity” paper, were the frat men—especially the men of Chi Phi.

“The worst to be urged against the fraternity is the dissipated character of its members,” the paper editorialized in 1882, citing one man who returned from San Francisco one night accompanied by “several disreputable girls.” The editorial continued: “Then this representative of fraternity culture, this true and upright gentleman, introduced one of the girls as his sister.”⁷

The early years saw the birth of solid Bear traditions—including adoption of the campus mascot, the Golden Bear, who was a real bear in the early years. There was the Big C built on Charter Hill above campus and the annual Burial of “Bourdon” and “Minto”—two unpopular freshman texts, complete with a parade carrying the books inside a coffin, a bonfire,

Places

One of the two original buildings, South Hall still stands by the Campanile. It is all that remains of the old Victorian campus that was superseded by architect John Galen Howard’s ode to the classics.

much drinking afterwards (a “bust”), and, at least once, a threat of gunplay.

“How the Sophomores tried to steal everything they could get their hands on and how they didn’t do it,” is how the *Occident* headlined its story on the 1882 fracas. It began with the arrival of the event’s key speaker at Berkeley Station. “As soon as he stepped off the train they made a rush for him. What they would have done with him is an unsolved mystery, for he pulled a pistol on them and ordered them to stand off.”⁸

How Berkeley’s Coeds Doffed Their Hats

Unlike many of the nation’s universities, Cal admitted women almost from its founding, starting in 1870, and without restriction. Women were beginning to attend colleges in large numbers at this time, but not every institution was as welcoming as Cal. Its great rival in the Bay Area, Stanford, began limiting coeds by a strict quota in 1899. By 1892, graduate Millicent Washburn Shinn, the first woman to earn a PhD at Cal, reported in the magazine *Overland Monthly* that women made up one-third of the student body.

Berkeley may have pioneered education for women, but coeds weren’t always well treated. When Lilian Bridgman appeared on campus in 1886, a top graduate of Kansas State, she knocked on the door of Joseph Le Conte, whose reputation brought her there. He got her set, and soon Lilian was



c. 1900: Women students in black “plugs”—battered top hats typically worn by junior men. Hats designed for women tended to be broader brimmed. Courtesy of the Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley.

scuttling through creeks for her master's thesis, "The Origin of Sex in Freshwater Algae." She was stymied, however, by one professor who refused to put his "valuable compound microscope in the hands of any coed."¹

Coming to her rescue was Phoebe Apperson Hearst, whose late husband, George, made millions in the Nevada silver mines. Phoebe, one of the university's greatest benefactors, specialized in the care of coeds. With Hearst's funding, Lilian bought a microscope. Mrs. Ellen Metcalf McHenry—whose daughter Mary McHenry Keith would become Berkeley's leading suffragist—let Lilian use her greenhouse as a lab.

Two decades later women still weren't seen as campus equals. Men were scandalized in 1904 when coeds proposed cheering at the Big Game with Stanford. But sophomore Alice Joy insisted that women do the traditional Oski Wow Wow cheer. "I firmly believe that future games will see the women taking just as active a part in the cheerleading as the men do now," Alice predicted.²

Three months later an even greater scandal shook the town. "Coeds will wear no hats on campus," the *Courier* blared. It started when a math professor complained about "women who insisted on wearing big picture bonnets and sitting in the front of the room to the exclusion of the vision of the men students, who usually sit in the back."³

By March, a call to doff hats by the Associated Women Students had succeeded beyond their dreams. More than 4,000 girls in Berkeley had "joined the hatless brigade."

"The power of example is strong," the *Courier* reported. "Now almost the entire younger female population of Berkeley has followed suit." "Society misses," high school students, "even the tots in the primary classes scorn a hat." "To the stranger, the custom is somewhat astonishing, but its picturesqueness cannot be questioned." The hatmakers, of course, were "absolutely threatened with bankruptcy."⁴

Perhaps it was the hat crusade, perhaps not, but by August 1905, the *Courier* reported, more women than men were signing up for the new term. "They make good learners and they are the rank and file of the teaching class of the state," the paper applauded. "More power to them!"⁵

Places

Hearst Avenue is named for Phoebe Apperson Hearst, not for her husband and not for her son, newspaperman William Randolph Hearst. Julia Morgan's impressive Berkeley City Club, built in 1929 as the Berkeley Women's City Club, shows the civic stature women had attained.