

Olive Trader Nybladh Recalls a Washington's Birthday Scandal (January 1913)

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Manifestations of Antioch Colleges past are usually recognizable to Antiochians, but not always. Olive Trader (class of 1913), married Carl Nybladh in 1918. A high school teacher in nearby Xenia, she still has a scholarship in her name awarded annually to a deserving graduate of Xenia High School. The following is her account of an experience from her senior year that would not have happened to any Antiochian alive today.

Recollection of Olive Trader Nybladh, class of 1913

One day during the month of January 1913 I was called into the office of Dr. Stephen Weston, dean of the college, and requested in my capacity as president of the Girls

Association of Antioch College to arrange some social activity for a Washington birthday party. I was to work with Carl King, president of the Boys

Association. Dr. Weston was always concerned about the lack of social activities at the College.

Excellent cooperation was given by all the students. A pageant portraying the first meeting of George and Martha was prepared, elaborate decorations were made and we became extravagant and even engaged a stringed orchestra from Springfield for the occasion.

A few days prior to the big event Dr. Fess, then president of the college, requested the two associations

presidents to report to his office immediately following the chapel service. This certainly meant that something was

in the air

and we went to the office in fear and trembling. We were not mistaken. Pounding his fists on the table, we were told in no uncertain terms that if any dancing took place in this occasion we would be expelled.

Absolutely ignorant of the plans of some of the students to dance when the orchestra played we could not grasp the meaning of the warning.

It was a nice dull party. The music was excellent and there were plenty of wallflowers.

Thanks to the student body we were not expelled. Many years later Dr. Weston told me that he would have been dismissed also had dancing taken place.

The first play to be presented on the east steps of the college was given under direction of Miss Jean B. Elwell, who was the dramatics instructor during the summer session of 1913.

The members of the class of 1913 wrote the history of Antioch College and presented it as a pageant on the east campus.

No prohibition of dancing appears in the College Catalog for the academic year 1912-1913. In fact, no published set of rules had explicitly forbidden dancing at Antioch College since 1884, so it is possible that Olive and her classmates had no idea that it was against the rules. What

might have elicited such a strenuous reaction from the college president? As historian Mark Oppenheimer states,

conservative Protestants have always been suspicious of art's propensity to deceive and entice, but among the arts, singing has been more permissible than the visual arts, which can tend toward idolatry, and everything has been preferable to dancing, with its obvious evocation of sex.

The tendency to restrict behaviors permissible in the Bible (for example, Moses sister Miriam dances after the victory at the Red Sea, and David dances to celebrate the ark's return to Jerusalem) was especially strong among temperance activists in the early 20th century, and Fess was already a leading figure in the movement to ban spirituous liquors. Furthermore, he had won reelection to the House of Representatives the previous year, a bitter campaign marked by accusations of his infidelity. As 1912 was a banner election for Democrats across the nation, Fess

Republican victory can be attributed in part to the endorsement he received from the Anti-Saloon League, one of the most effective lobbying organizations in American history. Given his political constituency, and the recent if unfounded hits to his reputation as a moralist, Fess could hardly give approval to his students to do anything that his supporters might be against.

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Recollection of Olive Nybladh Trader, class of 1913

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