

Buried papers found in stone

Class of 1872 gone but not forgotten

By LARRY DENDY

Because his last name began with a "W", Albert McCay Williams of Macon, the president of the Class of 1872, was the last of the 46 young men who graduated from the university in 1872 to sign his name to a class roster.

The roster was rolled up and placed in a metal box along with copies of a campus humor paper called *The Cat* and another newspaper called the *Collegian*. The box was inserted into a hole in a heavy stone block, and as part of their graduation ceremony, the members of the Class of 1872 buried the stone alongside the sapling of a water oak tree.

When the stone was dug up this month after 106 years, and the box opened, all that remained of the scroll was a wad of soggy, mottled brown paper. But barely visible in the corner of the one segment of paper that remained intact is the word "Williams," written in ink.

The copies of the newspapers are tattered and browned, but some portions are legible. The papers were folded, and the part not exposed to air and moisture which got into the box over the years may be readable, if they do not crumble as they are unfolded.

An expert in the preserving and restoring of old documents will be at the university this week to examine the papers. Depending on what he says, some attempt may be made to salvage the newspapers, which are thought to be the only existing copies of these publications.

The metal box, about eight inches long, six inches high and five inches wide, was fitted into a niche chiseled in the bottom of the 700-pound stone block. The top of the block was inscribed "Class of 1872."

The inscription on the block has been visible above ground for years at the foot of a tall tree in front of Phi Kappa Hall on north campus. But the existence of a

time capsule inside the stone did not come to light until last summer.

Dr. E. Merton Coulter, Regents Professor of history emeritus and an authority on university history, ran across an account in an 1872 Athens newspaper of university commencement ceremonies in July of that year.

According to the account, class members gathered in the Chapel, where Andrew A. Lipscomb, who was then chancellor of the university, offered a prayer. Poems were read and speeches made. The class historian and the class prophet spoke.

Albert McCay Williams also spoke, and the graduates and audience sang songs titled "Along the Pathway" and "A Few More Tomorrows."

After the singing, the graduates trooped out to the quadrangle in front of the Chapel, where a small sapling had already been set out. They sang more songs, and each class member scooped some dirt around the tree. Then they formed a circle around the tree and passed around a peace pipe, which each man smoked.

The newspaper account says that a marker was placed near the tree, and that a box containing "sundry mementoes," including the class roll and the two newspapers, was buried. But it was not

until physical plant workers probed the quadrangle with a metal detector that the box was determined to be inside the inscribed stone marker.

Workers dug up the stone on a chilly Friday afternoon as a crowd of university workers and students watched. President Fred C. Davison chipped away some plaster-like material that had been used to seal the box into the stone, and removed the box as the crowd pressed in to see the contents.

There was only the browned, tattered paper inside. The papers were immediately taken to the main library, where they are being held until the restoration expert examines them.

The Class of 1872 was apparently the first to plant a tree as a way of memorializing the class.

The Cover

The cover photo shows the box taken from the Class of 1872 marker. The box contains the soggy remnants of the class roster. The lid contains copies of two campus newspapers of the period. Portions of the papers that were folded and not exposed to air and moisture are readable, but the paper is extremely brittle. The box, which appears to be zinc-coated, has few small rust spots, but otherwise it endured the years in good condition. The lumps of material on the box are plaster used to seal the box into the stone.



AT LEFT, physical plant workers used a tractor and loader to lift the 700-pound stone from the ground. Below, President Fred Davison removes plaster that sealed metal box inside the stone.

