

The Assiniboian Canticle

A Christmas carol for the English, anthropology and sociology departments

Christmas is the cruelest month,
breeding

Nostalgia out in the dead land,
mixing

Memory and desire, stirring

Dull hearts with warm pain.

Liquor kept us warm, covering

Hurt in forgetful glow, feeding

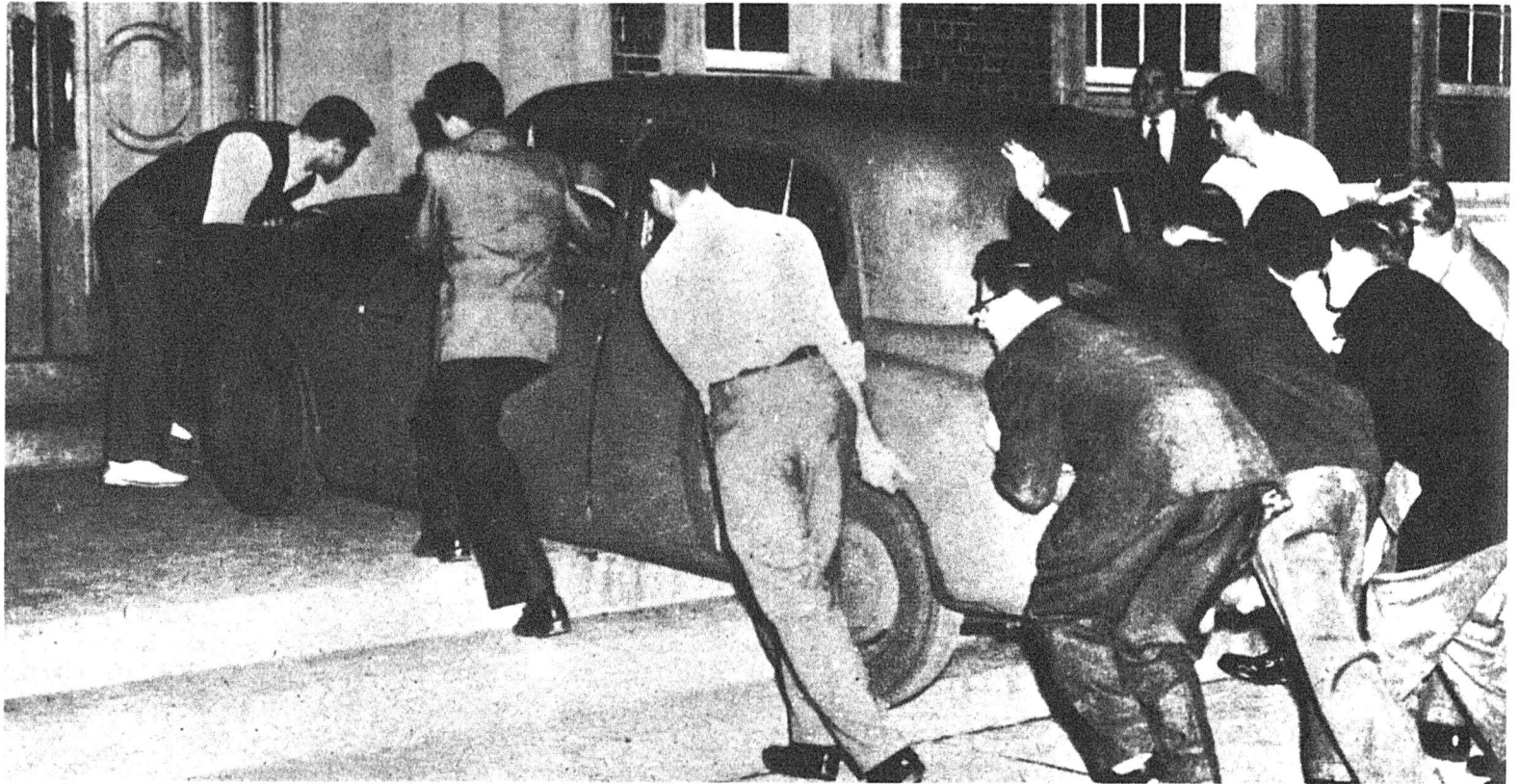
A little life in fried students . . .

with apologies to T. S. Eliot
and Ezra Pound

You wouldn't catch me working late in Assiniboia Hall at this time of year. No chance. If, sometime after Christmas, it is noted there are a few sections of English and Sociology without instructors there are a few of us left who will know what has happened. The missing will have been seized and civilized by the Ghost of Christmas Past. There was a time when the Spirit or spirits of Christmas Present had more power in Assiniboia. The Ghost of Christmas Past was held at bay, for the Spirit of Christmas Future was allied with that of the current Christmas. But, no more.

It is said that this may be the last Christmas for the old hall at the north end of a long walk through university history. The end of its usefulness means a cold marble marker, as well, for much of the tradition which this campus held as little as five years ago and which now seems going for good.

Don't misunderstand. I realize that time does not stand still and that progress must be made; that rebellion against what has been is a characteristic of youth and that youth is at a premium just now (the media tick the joyous word to me constantly). But progress is slowly converting what was gracious about both the ivy-covered professors and the ivy-covered walls into the impersonality of chrome and concrete; into the highly efficient multiversity.



THREE EASY STEPS

. . . to parking a car where it shouldn't be

Multiversity. Is that not a horrible word, a word like megapolis to bring conservatives and social planners rabidly frothing to turn back the clock. But I do not advocate turning back the clock, for like all clocks ours must turn the entire circle to reach the same hour again. I would only have those of you who were here remember and those of your who are new consider a different sort of atmosphere for living at a university.

"Fac Deus noster, ut hoc refecti, quaecumque vera constantius sequamur, secundum Jesu Christi spiritum. Amen."

How many of you have ever attended more than two or three meals where this little Latin grouping was used? For those of you who never have and who don't read Latin, it is the university grace, once regularly heard echoing softly over four hundred male heads despite the terrible acoustics of the dining room in Athabasca Hall. How many of you remember the tall ceiling of that place, the warm wood paneling scarred by over fifty years of residents, and the tripping of Dr. Morrison's Scottish burr as he said grace?

Meals in the evening were al-

ways 'formal' then. No resident could get supper without wearing a collar and tie. There were always those who resented the waste of time, but it was a pretty good encouragement to everyone to believe they were civilized and capable of something better than cut-offs and a sweatshirt.

There was an air of devilment about, never an aura of stuffiness. There are many letters on file with the administration from distraught mothers wondering what had happened to their daughters. Were they ever told? With my own eyes I have seen eight-girl kicklines push into the morass of young men and tables separating them from the front of the hall, only to emerge at that front, numbering seven. It usually shook up the girls, for one disappearance would raise the courage of the men who were dining to the point where four other young ladies could be gone before the group escaped the hall. Those girls who knew this and joined the kickline, when they could, because of it were usually out of luck. The gentlemen of Assiniboia and Athabasca were discriminating. Was there fear such guests would not return? None. Always the kicklines came back for the residences were a mighty block of votes.

A winter's night was always lovely on that part of the campus. The cold, ice-white light from the moon glinted back from the snow laying thickly on the ground and on the tall conifers. The incandescent beams from the old lamps lent a warmth to the scene which came more from the spirit of the buildings than from the electricity. Always in the evenings sounds and light filtered from the buildings. Always something going on. Like the evening, Peter Montgomery and E. N. Rao, that the young man who lived in your office came home and found his entire room complete with door, moved to the front lawn and carefully rearranged just the way he had left it.

Christmas was really a season in those old buildings when they were 'the' official university residences. Only there, in this season,

could Dr. Johns have encountered a young man entering a campus residence with a case of beer under each arm and feel compelled to say only, "Good evening, Brian". The reason for Dr. Johns being in the residence at all? The Christmas banquet. A gala occasion with all the residents of Assiniboia, Athabasca and Pembina gathered to feast with their guests in a scene which would have done credit to an Anglo-Saxon mead hall. To be sure, the mead was all consumed in a long afternoon before the banquet and during a longer evening after it, but the food was the biggest triumph of the cooks all year. It was rumored, but I could not tell by the taste, that the rum sauce for the pudding had actually got rum in it. Ah, the spirit of the thing.

It was never a long celebration in terms of days or weeks. The good fellowship would be blown in four or five days, then Christmas break would see the residences empty overnight as most of the students left for home. It was those left in the halls who often saw the real Christmas spirit. Major Hooper, good scout on this campus for many years, regularly set up a program which got all



THE SILENCE OF A STUDIED BOOK

. . . is heard where Christmas used to ring

remembrances by
dave mappin

photos from
old yearbooks

those left in the residences invited to the homes of faculty members for Christmas dinner. There are many stories of Major Hooper wandering around on the afternoon of Christmas Day to take all the stragglers home with him.

Those of you who knew the old residences and the inhabitants will