

# IV

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In choosing George Bowman, a public school administrator, the Trustees signaled their intention to adjust the university's course charted by Leebrock. A veteran of World War I, Bowman had the look of command, gallant good manners, a resonant voice, and a generous nature. With his habit of measuring his judgments, his even temperament, firm character, he proved a wise choice to rebuild and expand a university with a war-thinned faculty, plant, and student body. His fatherly demeanor and warm interest in people fostered a family feeling. By 1959, the semi-decade year, he had rebuilt the faculty from 114 in 1944 to over 400 (43 per cent doctorates); orchestrated a major expansion of the physical plant (including Memorial Gymnasium and a football stadium, both dedicated to the alumni killed in World War II); doubled campus acreage by purchasing acres to the south of campus; and carved a new college—Fine and Professional Arts (1959)—out of the College of Arts and Sciences, which had been unwieldy. He made the emeritus rank available to faculty. And he hired a host of new faculty, including many Kent alumni, whose talent and devotion leave an indelible mark on the school.

Bowman presided over what the 1955 BURR called the Golden Years, 1944-1963. The school's atmosphere here was neighborly and intimate; its personality genial; people greeted one another by name. And the campus, with its canopy of trees and its ever sun-dappled greensward billowing up Normal Hill to buildings beaded with ivy, had the idyllic look of a small college. Front Campus, between Memorial Gate and Terrace Drive, was still the vibrant center of campus life, though Terrace Gate opened in 1951 when Terrace Hall was built. Most of the 5,000 or so students in the 1950s were generation college students drawn from ethnically rich northwestern Ohio but with a healthy sprinkling from other Ohio counties. A surprising large number came from more than twenty foreign countries, and they, with a large peppering of students from eastern states that had not yet developed university systems (New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania), gave a cosmopolitan seasoning to the mix.

Ceremony and tradition were still valued. The student body voted overwhelmingly, in 1956, to overturn a dean's decision to abolish dinks. At the end of Freshman Week students, in best bib and tucker, were formally but warmly welcomed into the University family at a reception given by President and Mrs. Bowman in the presidential residence, the Curtiss House (now the Williamson Alumni Center). The Bowmans had an uncanny knack for remembering students' names years later. One sign of the times, unthinkable later, was a spreading interest in religion, the result perhaps of the students' having grown up in the Great Depression and of coming of age in the anxious aftermath of World War II, the Korean War, the Cold War, The Bomb—when the old certitudes of human progress had collapsed. Clubs representing nearly every denomination thrived. Religious Emphasis Week was on the school's official calendar each spring for most of the fifties.

Fraternalism and sororities flourished as never before—and never after. On May 27, 1955, the student body voted to open the campus to national social organizations. The following year, the school had national fraternities and sororities, along with seven other local sororities. And, appropriately, Kappa Mu Kappa, the school's oldest men's group (1922), was the first to link up with a





*Kent hall of famer Wilbur “Wib” Little eludes Bowling Green defenders (1949). Kent was one of the few northern college teams to have African American players; in the late forties the players voted to reject an invitation to a post-season game in segregationist Florida rather than leave their black teammates behind.*

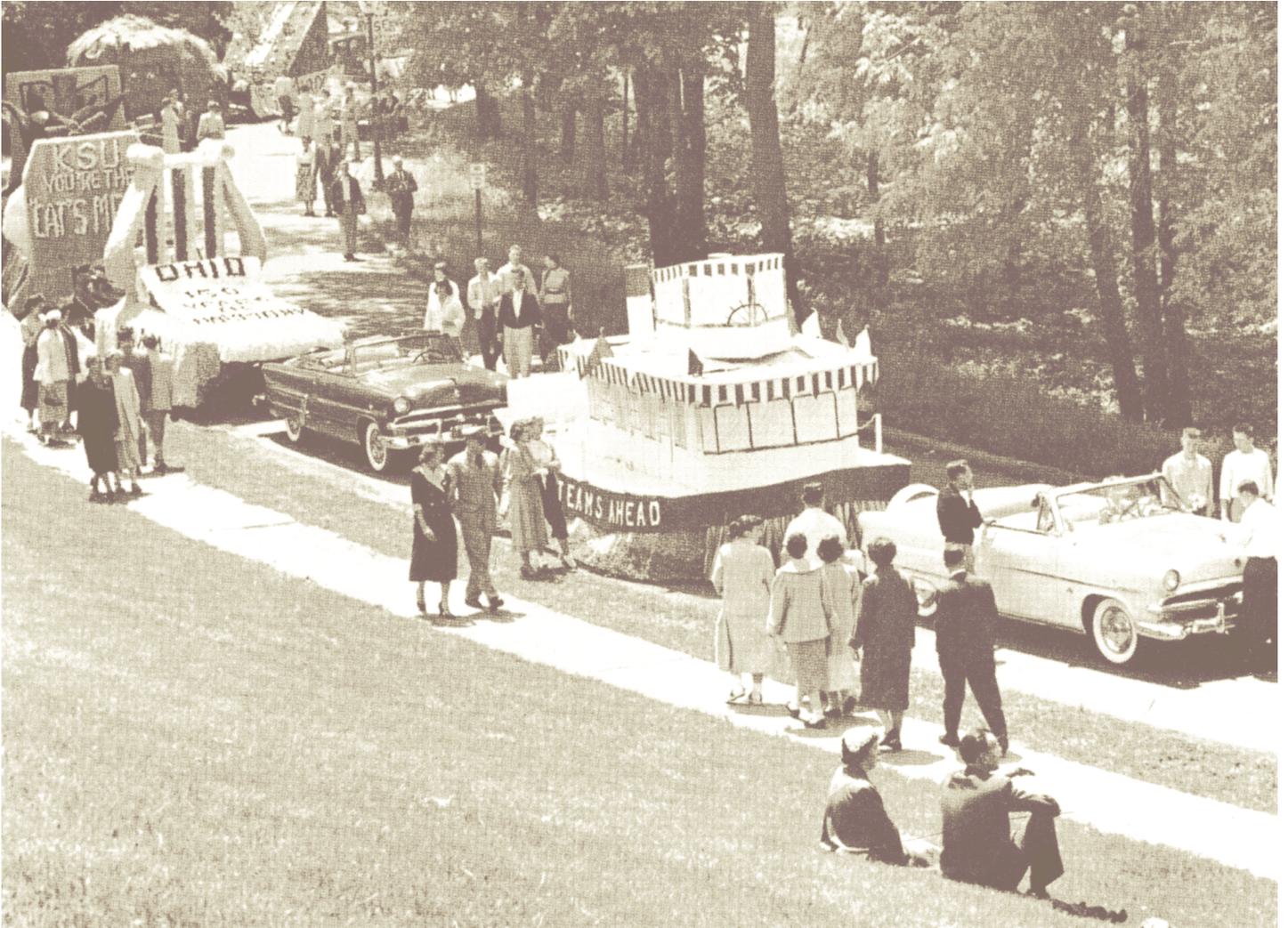


*George A. Bowman, Kent’s fifth and longest serving president (1944-1963), presided over a harmonious era in the school’s history.*

national body—Delta Upsilon, followed soon after by fourteen others. During this Greek heyday the air was lyrical with “rushes,” men’s “smokers” and women’s “teas,” “little sisters” and “big brothers,” and “pinnings” solemnized by moonlight serenades. In a gesture of satirical protest, some aspiring writers and artists formed an anti-Greek club called the Macedonians. One Macedonian, Paul Zimmer, later became one of America’s most respected poets. National academic honoraries blossomed as well, along with professional honoraries—Delta Sigma Pi (Business), Kappa Delta Pi (Education), Delta Omicron (Music), to name a few. Cardinal Key for women and Blue Key for men were the most prized national service honoraries.

Bowman made one of his happiest decisions in 1946 when he hired Trevor Rees as Athletic Director and football coach. A former All-American, Rees was a keen judge of athletic talent and a gifted teacher of coaches—among the many who went on to bright careers coaching college and professional teams were Lou Holtz and Don McCaffrey. During Rees’ tenure (1946-57) Kent joined the Mid American Conference (MAC) and, year after year, fielded outstanding teams in every varsity sport. The football team made its postseason debut, in 1954, at the Refrigerator Bowl in Evansville, Indiana. A galaxy of stars brightened the era, including Wilbur “Wib” Little, Jack Mancos, Lou Mariano (football); Bill Cox (track); Olympians Joe Kotys (gymnastics) and Pete George (weight-lifting); and all the members of the 1949-50 basketball team (18-4) and Begala’s undefeated 1957-58 wrestling team. In 1950 a victory bell—a symbol of the school’s coming-of-age in varsity sports—was set up on the Commons at the foot of Blanket Hill, the traditional spot for courting, later the scene of tragedy.

Homecoming, with its parties, football game, and dance, and Campus Day, with its songfest, Maypole dance, and parade of gaudy floats, were still the cardinal points of the year. In addition to tray-sliding down Normal Hill, students now could shoot pool, bowl, and socialize in the new Student Union (now Ritchie



*Campus Day, 1954: Floats lining up on Terrace Drive before the parade.*

Hall). They could chase tennis balls on the courts behind Engleman Hall. But no longer could they ice skate on Blackbird Lake; it had been improved into a parking lot. The cultural menu offered something for every taste: informal sockhops; formal gown-and-tux balls, with dancing to the music of famous big bands; the Shark Club "Aqua-Campus" water ballet show; Professor Roy Metcalf's Twin Marching Bands; the Oratorio Guild's pre-Christmas performance of Handel's *Messiah*; Pork Barrel; No Time for Classes; Rowboat Regatta; and the Sadie Hawkins Day Chase and Dance. Each year an upperclassman was dubbed Duke of Kent. And a lovely necklace of queens and their attendants decorated the school year: Homecoming Queen; Military Ball Queen; Miss Kent State; Campus Day Queen; Rowboat Regatta Queen; Chestnut Burr Queen.

Rules for women were only a shade less precise than before the war. Women were still "campused" for failing to sign in and out of residence halls, or for signing in after the hated ten-thirty week-night curfew. Couples hovered like amorous moths outside women's halls, waiting for the witching-hour bell to ring, before parting. Clothing styles were more formal than they would become a decade later. For classes, women wore pleated skirts, cashmere sweaters with pearls, bobby socks with saddle shoes or bucks. Men wore sport coats or sweaters, shirts with ties, argyle socks with saddle shoes or bucks. Hair was trim and glasses horn-rimmed. Decorum was the rule in classes as

*The Williamson Alumni Center—formerly Curtiss House, home to University presidents—houses the Office of Alumni Relations and serves as an elegant gathering place for graduates and friends.*



*Sadie Hawkins Day, inspired by the popular comic strip “L’il Abner,” featured a chase, in which women pursued the men of their choice around campus, and an evening dance. Here Jean Olson is “Daisy Mae” and her “L’il Abner” is Matthew W. Bradley.*

well. The first rite of passage from high school to college was the professor’s addressing the student by title—Miss or Mister—rather than by first name, as became customary in the egalitarian seventies. One harbinger of the rebellious future, however, did visit the campus—the party raid fad. One May night, in 1956, a spring-intoxicated crowd of Stopher men, bent on plundering trophies of underwear from Lowry Hall, tumbled the dean of men down the hill when he tried to reason with them.

Bowman readjusted the scales in favor of the College of Education, giving it five new departments. At the same time, after the mid fifties there was a perceptible stir and bustle in the air, a feeling of expectation on tip-toe, as of great things about to happen. Green shoots of scholarly vitality could be seen: library holdings reached 170,000 volumes, academic scholarships increased, research was encouraged, Honors study expanded. Ambitious plans were afoot for doctoral programs. Faculty members debated the direction the school should be taking. This occurred in the broader context of a historic trend sprung from the exigencies and dislocations of World War II: a gradual turning from the ideal of traditional liberal study—to cultivate the powers of the mind in order to make productive and responsible citizens—toward progressivism in education and training the student for the workplace. Many new departments, even in Arts and Sciences, called themselves sciences, to emphasize their practicality and utility. Or so claimed those who, pointing to a contagious emphasis on specialization and vocationalism, deplored what they saw as a scuttling of “education” in favor of “training.” As corrective, they mooted a core curriculum of liberal arts courses to be required of all students. But this idea would languish for three decades, in large part because of the seismic change registered on July 20, 1959. On that day the state senate passed Senate Bill Number 61, which licensed Kent and Bowling Green to offer doctoral-level courses. For the next three decades administrative and faculty attention and energy were focused on building a superstructure of first-rate graduate programs on a strong foundation of research.