

Averett Traditions: Hiding the CROOK

One of the oldest traditions of Roanoke Female College was the annual hiding of the crook. A long shepherd's staff, scarred and battered by years of mistreatment, was hidden by the senior class for the junior class to locate. If the juniors found the crook, they would in turn hide it again for the seniors to find. This game probably began as a means of creating class spirit between the two upper classes. The old Crook was so damaged over the years, that in 1933 a new Crook was presented to the school by that senior class. The tradition continued on for many more years.

There were strict rules for this game:

1. The Crook could be hidden on the campus or in a building, provided at least two inches of it showed and it was not under lock and key. The seniors had to disclose whether it was hidden inside or outside.
2. The seniors were given 24 hours in which to hide the Crook after it was presented in Chapel. During this single day the juniors were not to interfere in any way. If the juniors found the Crook anytime during the year, it was their duty to hide it under the same conditions as above.
3. No junior could touch the Crook if a senior was touching it: no senior could touch the Crook if a junior was touching it.
4. Only members of one class were allowed to participate in Crook hunts: thus, if juniors were aided by seniors, the Crook had to be forfeited to the senior class if found, and vice versa.
5. Girls could not go into the art room, onto the fire-escapes, nor on the roof in Crook hunts.
6. A truce was declared each weekend from 11:00 p.m. Saturday until noon Monday. Truce could also be called any time when the referee called for it.
7. No person was excused from meals, Chapel, or classes to engage in Crook hunts.
8. Girls could not go out of the main building or the annex from 7:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. to search for the Crook.
9. Students were not to engage in Crook hunts after regular light bells had rung.
10. Pulling, holding, kicking, pinching, biting, etc., were illegal tactics in dealing with one's opponents.
11. There was to be no talk of unfair play in this game.
12. If the Crook was not found by the end of the year, the seniors would present it during Class Day to the upcoming senior class to hide next fall for the incoming junior class.

The "Ballad of the Crook" was sung by the senior class before hiding it each fall:

The Crook is hidden at Averett
The Seniors have it now;
The Juniors strongly crave it.
It must be kept somehow.

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The Seniors hide it every year.
The Seniors have it now;
The thought of losing it brings fear,
It must be kept somehow.

The Juniors spend many weary nights,
The Seniors have it now;
Up and down steps of many flights.
It must be kept somehow.

It must not be under lock and key.
The seniors have it now;
One end must be where all can see,
It must be kept somehow.

On class night it is brought out,
The Seniors have it now;
From every throat there comes a shout,
It will be kept somehow.”

[B.M.A.G. and P.L.]

In over seventy-five years of hiding the Crook, only about five junior classes ever found it. Once, the Crook was buried in the ground with only a small stump showing; many juniors stumbled over it and did not realize what had tripped them. At another time the senior class president hid it between the mattress and box spring of her own bed. The Junior Class of 1936 was the last class to locate the staff, finding it in the furnace room.

In 1940 a junior coming out of the telephone booth in the Day Students' parlor spied an object under the couch that she thought was a hockey stick. When she pulled it out, she realized what she had found and went screaming through the building that the Crook had been found. That junior's joy was squelched when a senior remembered one of the above rules: no one could search between 11:00 Saturday night and noon on Monday. Thus, a truce was declared and the Crook was returned to the seniors to rehide.

The tradition of hiding the Crook was eventually discontinued because of the mysterious disappearance of the Crook itself. Maybe the hunt had simply gotten out of hand. Maybe the last class to hide it forgot where it was hidden. At any rate, for many years the Crook was considered lost and the tradition ceased.

In 1999, the Crook was discovered in the college vault and subsequently placed in the Archives for permanent keeping.