

## "Beware the Ides of March!"

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While most people associate the Ides of March with the Roman calendar, or Shakespeare's play, *Julius Caesar*, it became part of K-State history in 1916 when the senior class voted to celebrate what became known as Roughneck Day on March 15. The other classes quickly voted to participate in the event which required the students to appear on campus "attired in such a manner that their own mothers would not know them," meaning dressed in the most outlandish clothing possible! It was further reported in the *Kansas State Collegian* that "dire vengeance will be meted out to those who dare to show themselves on the campus not attired according to regulations." While it was believed that students would not suffer the same fate as Caesar, they were advised to "beware the Ides of March" on March 15 or it was possible they would receive some form of hazing or verbal abuse from the upper classmen if they arrived on campus dressed as normal!

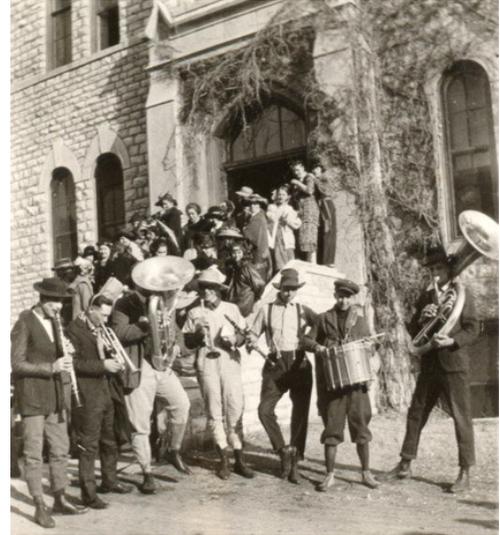
An article in the March 18, 1916 edition of the *Collegian* reported that hundreds of male and female students participated, coming as "tramps, capitalists, old women, young women, farmers and dudes...every conceivable costume that could possibly distinguish a 'rough neck' was to be found." Furthermore, "the disregard for conventionalities even went so far as to apply the paddle to those who failed to live up to the motions passed at the various class meetings, that it was to be a day of motley and ragged attire."



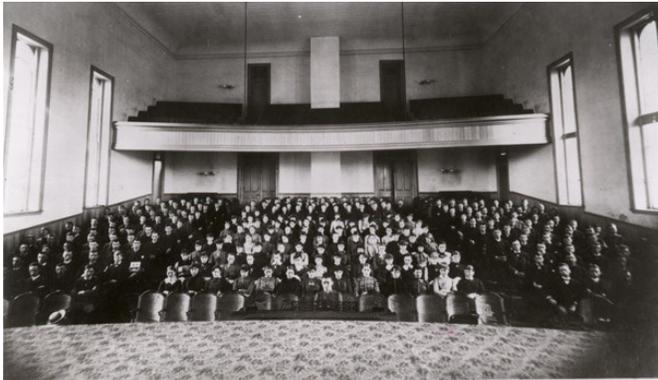
There is no official explanation as to how Roughneck Day got its name, but the message was clear, to come to campus dressed as rough as you could look, and expect the events of the day to resemble the same! In 1923 professor of economics, J. E. Kammeyer, stated that it was the one day of the year "dedicated to those who never shave their necks or wash behind their ears." Others referred to it as a "hobo holiday."

Regardless of its origin, the annual celebration of Roughneck Day occurred every Ides of March from 1916 until, well, read on!

The *Collegian* reported that costumes worn during the second Roughneck Day in 1917 were just as colorful and wild as the first ranging from girls in bathing suits to Charlie Chaplin look a likes.. And, "every conceivable type of humanity" could be found with the "dilapidated hobo" the post popular in terms of numbers; tin cans and buckets were tied to cars and motorcycles to enhance the festivities. It was noted that paddles used on non-participants and rowdiness were less evident than the first year.



Activities common to Roughneck Day included a large turnout at chapel in Anderson Hall where attendance was higher than normal so that students could see and be seen in their strange attire. A parade through town was also part of the festivities and drew a large and



Anderson Hall Chapel, 1888

boisterous crowd consisting of students and residents of Manhattan. While apparently not officially sanctioned, students did not attend classes, especially during the morning. For example, in 1919 students paraded to campus around 7:30 and during a mass meeting decided that "...school was a nuisance and that after 9:00 am classes would be called off for the morning. This decision was backed up by the student body. After first hour everyone was out for a good time and a good laugh." Following a get

acquainted "mixer" students paraded to town and had an impromptu program in a theater and then danced at the Community Building before returning to campus in time for afternoon classes.

By 1923, Roughneck Day had become more formalized and controlled. The president of K-State, William Jardine, made it clear that "if students did not attend the first two classes and use some discretion in their celebration the custom would have to be abandoned."



The "Wampus Cats," the official K-State pep organization, was put in charge of the events. They included merriment and dancing in the recreation center and a humorous program in the chapel (both in Anderson Hall) during the morning. Instead of the annual parade ("folks got too tired hiking down town and back"), a freshman-sophomore Olympics was held during the afternoon consisting of events such as tug-of-war, relay races, and sack fights. Freshmen were advised to turn out and come away victorious or they would have to wear their beanies during the spring baseball season! That evening the entertainment continued with a dance in Nichols Gym for "roughnecks" (35 cents admission) and another at Johnnie's in Aggieville for "highbrows" who wanted to dress up for \$1.10!



The events in 1924 were similar to the previous year. Mandatory attendance for the first two hours of class was followed by organized activities under the direction of the Wampus Cats. The *Collegian* reported that Roughneck Day would be held next year provided the event this year is well organized and college property is not damaged.

Although Roughneck Day was a student initiated and driven "holiday," a review of the articles that appeared in the college newspaper from 1916 through the early 1920s indicate the administration and faculty went along with the event because the entertainment was organized and good clean fun was experienced by a large portion of the student body. However, by the beginning of second semester, 1925, Roughneck Day had out lived its popularity with the administration and faculty, as well as students. In February, President Jardine announced there would not be a Roughneck Day that year and it would be replaced by an Easter vacation from the evening of April 9, a Thursday, through Monday evening, April 13 (this became the first spring break in the history of the college!). He further declared that if any vacation is taken by the students during the "Ides of March," the usual time for Roughneck Day, "his approval of the Easter vacation will be annulled and classes will be held as usual." As reported in the *Collegian* on April 3, 1925, the last few years students had used Roughneck Day as purely a holiday instead of a time for different events for which it was originally intended. Ironically, a major initiative for replacing Roughneck Day with an Easter break came by way of a request from the Student Self Governing Association who believed the entire student body deserved a few days away from campus and the rigors of attending class. Thus, "beware the Ides of March" took on a new meaning at K-State and, like Caesar, Roughneck Day met its impending doom!



Do other colleges have a tradition of roughneck day or roughnecks, you ask? Limited research did not reveal much information other than it is known that the Sooner Schooner, the covered wagon seen today at the University of Oklahoma football games, is driven by RUF/NEKS, an OU spirit group. The RUF/NEKS earned the name around 1915, about the same time as Roughneck Day was organized at K-State, but there doesn't seem to be any association. A few years after receiving their moniker, the RUF/NEKS began to include paddles as part of their attire.

In closing, it should be noted that the Easter recess was in place at K-State from April 1925 through the second, or spring semester of 1960, usually from Thursday evening until the following Tuesday morning. This meant that Saturday morning classes, which were also on the calendar during this period, did not meet. Easter recess was replaced by a spring break the second semester of academic year 1960-1961 and lasted one calendar week. This university holiday is still being observed so, K-Staters, enjoy "the Ides of March!"

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*Sources: Kansas State Collegian, Kansas Industrialist, K-State annual Catalogues, University Archives Photograph Collection (Vertical Files: Roughneck Day and Anderson Hall, and Charles L. Marshall, Sr. Collection), KSU History Index, Wikipedia.*