

Chapter One

Foot ball has suddenly made its appearance

Harry Hedges was a mountain of a man. His friends called him “Jumbo.” He spent his childhood working as a field laborer in Urbana, a farm town in western Ohio, and after he enrolled at the Ohio State University the college yearbook described him as “Not pretty, but massive.” By the spring of 1886 Hedges had become the president of the Ohio State sophomore class.¹

On the morning of April 28 of that year, the sophomores were walking out of the university’s chapel service when they saw a line of thirty men marching toward them double-file. One man in the formation waved the flag of the junior class. Another held the flag of the sophomores, and a third carried an oilcan, which they intended to use to burn the sophomore flag. Each of the thirty men also carried a fifteen-inch club to prevent anyone from stopping them. When the sophomores realized that these juniors were planning to burn their flag, they looked to Hedges. Hedges considered the situation but he could see only one option to stop them. Standing alone and unarmed, he placed himself in the path of the marching junior line and demanded the sophomore flag.²

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Six months earlier Hedges had been elected vice president of his class. The student newspaper covered the election and noted, “All the persuasive power of Jumbo’s muscle was needed to keep the various candidates from stuffing the ballot box or falsifying the returns.”³ Before the election Hedges had decided against being sophomore president, letting his roommate, Joseph Dyer, take that

position. Hedges and Dyer both came from farming families but Dyer planned to apply to a law school after he graduated from Ohio State.⁴ Hedges apparently agreed that the words “class president” would be more useful decorating his friend’s student record.

The university was still young at this time, with an enrollment of only 330 students. That total included the four graduating classes, plus a grad school, a prep school, and various two-year professional schools, including dentistry, pharmacy, and veterinary. The sophomore class of Hedges and Dyer had an enrollment of only forty students.⁵

The forty sophomores, representing the graduating class of 1888, were dwarfed by the seventy students who immediately followed them—the freshmen from the graduating class of 1889.⁶ When the university first opened in 1873, the school’s total enrollment was only twenty-four students.⁷ Year by year the enrollment steadily increased because year by year each new group of freshmen arrived at least a little bit larger than the one before it. The freshmen arriving in the fall of 1885 had almost twice as many members as any other class.

In October one of the freshmen attempted to use his class’s size to their advantage. That freshman, William Morrey, organized a voting bloc, intending for his classmates to dominate a campus election.⁸ When the three upper classes caught wind of what Morrey was up to, they responded with a united front, foiling the plot. “The freshmen attempted too much,” the other classes gloated immediately afterward.⁹

Tensions remained high among the classes in the weeks that followed. A divisive feeling of rivalry filled the air. It was during this time that Jumbo Hedges and Joe Dyer challenged the freshmen to a football game.¹⁰

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Football was a campus tradition. No one knew exactly when that tradition began. Sitting on the west side of campus was the North Dorm, the school’s larger dormitory, and the students who lived there had played football on their grounds for as long as anyone remembered. The Ohio State student newspaper, the *Lantern*, had noted as early as April 1881: “Foot-ball is the order of the day at the Dorm, and nearly every evening witnesses a jolly game.”¹¹

Students had founded their newspaper in January of that same year, and the *Lantern* quickly began to hold a central position in campus life. It had a “local



The North Dorm, center of Ohio State campus life in the nineteenth century. (Photo courtesy of The Ohio State University Archives)

editor” in charge of campus news, a “personal editor” who published campus gossip, and an “exchanges editor” who let the students know what was happening on the campuses of other schools. The newspaper also had a “literary editor” who invited and published more scholarly submissions from the student body and an editor-in-chief who held the project together and offered, through editorials, a running commentary on life at Ohio State.

The *Lantern’s* first editor-in-chief seemed somewhat less enthusiastic than others about football. He noted in the spring of 1881 that the North Dorm students were still playing football even while everyone else had begun to play baseball.¹² It apparently took some time for everyone on campus to accept that football was played all year at the North Dorm.

The football that North Dorm students played was only informal pickup games but by the 1880s the students at major schools on the East Coast—Harvard, Princeton, Columbia, and Yale—had been playing football for several



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years with organized varsity teams. On some Eastern campuses the sport's popularity was rivaling even baseball. National sports magazines declared organized football to be a growing movement, and people across the country watched with anticipation, expecting that movement to spread west.¹³

At Ohio State, in the fall of 1885, the sophomores and freshmen agreed to organize formal class football teams. It seemed as reasonable a way as any to settle their differences. The *Lantern* celebrated Ohio State's step into organized football by cheering, "Foot ball has suddenly made its appearance."¹⁴

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Jumbo Hedges and Joe Dyer needed to build the sophomore team and their first task was to pick a captain. A captain in those days, in any sport, was a team's most important figure. He was the unquestioned leader on the field. In a role more like a modern coach, the captain in football trained his players, assigned them positions, and called his team's plays during games.¹⁵

Hedges apparently agreed that Dyer would be the better captain for their team. Dyer was a varsity athlete—he was the starting right fielder on the Ohio State baseball team.¹⁶ Hedges participated in the pickup football games at the Dorm but, despite his mass and muscle, he had never played more organized campus sports.¹⁷

Hedges preferred to be his team's manager. A manager was in charge of all of the team's off-field leadership responsibilities: recruiting players, finding opponents, and negotiating a schedule.¹⁸ Hedges already had an opponent so he focused on recruiting, inviting sophomore athletes with experience in the North Dorm games to join the class team.

One of the first people that he recruited was a sophomore named Fred Ball. Ball was a talented athlete. He was a member of the Ohio State tennis team, and he also was a member of a sophomore class tennis team that competed against the other classes.¹⁹ In the coming spring he would be a member of a new varsity football team, playing a position in the backfield called a "three-quarter back,"²⁰ so it is most likely that Joe Dyer, as the sophomore football team's captain, also put Ball in that position that fall.

Ball, like Hedges and Dyer, had joined the sophomore class government that year—Ball was the treasurer of their class²¹—but he spent more of his energy as a campus leader on a different organization. As a freshman he had been the O.S.U. delegate to the state Y.M.C.A. convention, and the following fall the campus Y.M.C.A. elected him to serve as president of their branch.²² Hedges and Ball each respected the campus achievements of the other.

Hedges next recruited a sophomore named Chester Aldrich. In contrast to Ball, Hedges's relationship with Aldrich seemed to be built on confrontation. Hedges and Aldrich were both born in Ohio but they came from separate worlds. Aldrich was a wealthy blue blood, known for his fine clothes and aristocratic manners.²³ He was raised on an estate near Ashtabula and before he arrived at Ohio State he had attended a prestigious prep school.²⁴ The patrician Aldrich thought that he deserved the kind of leadership positions that came to the gregarious Hedges naturally. The tension between the two came to a head late in the spring of their freshman year at the "Incognitus et Agnos," a campus end-of-year satirical event run by North Dorm students.²⁵ Aldrich objected to how Hedges wanted to use him in the show and he refused to perform, spoiling much of the fun for everyone.²⁶

Despite their differences, Hedges wanted Aldrich on the sophomore football team. Swallowing his pride, Aldrich accepted. The evidence suggests that Dyer put Aldrich next to Hedges on the line.

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The freshmen were building their own class team and they were led by a student named Charles Cutler Sharp. Everybody called him “C.C.”²⁷ In the era of J.P. Morgan, J.D. Rockefeller, and P.T. Barnum, men with business ambitions often preferred to be addressed by their initials. C.C. Sharp was a natural athlete and the leader of his class on almost any athletic field.

Sharp seemed most engaged at school when facing competition. He had earned a position on the varsity baseball team when he was still a prep student.²⁸ He also was a sprinter and he set a personal goal of winning the school championship in the 100-yard dash. He was listed as a member of the class of 1889²⁹ but he challenged the rest of the freshmen to join him in trying to graduate early.³⁰ He could not stand to see the class of 1888 have even that advantage over them.

Jesse Lee Jones was another North Dorm freshman but Jones had no interest in Sharp’s early-graduation challenge. Sharp had already spent two years on campus, as a student in the O.S.U. prep school, but for Jones the experience of university life was completely new. He had worked in a factory the previous year in his home town of Martins Ferry,³¹ and after he got to Ohio State he wanted to enjoy all that his school had to offer. He was elected sergeant-at-arms of the freshman class³² and he participated regularly in the North Dorm football games.

In those informal games Jones and Sharp each brought out the competitive spirit in the other. Sharp was an established class leader and Jones wanted to dethrone a campus king. Sharp understood what Jones wanted and he was not willing to let it happen. In one Dorm game the two faced each other on opposing lines. Tempers flared, and as the game played out they nearly sent each other to the campus infirmary.³³

Jumbo Hedges did not personally dislike most of these freshmen, and despite the rivalry between the classes most of them did not personally dislike him. He had known many of them since they were prep students. He had looked out for them as preps, even tutoring some of them when they needed help with Latin.³⁴ He had grown up the oldest of eight children in his family³⁵ and he continued to act like a big brother after he came to Ohio State.

During spring break one year earlier Hedges had put up a prep named Frank Raymund in his family home in Urbana, Ohio.³⁶ Raymund remained a loyal friend afterward. Their friendship, however, did not stop Raymund from joining the freshman football team.

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The freshmen and sophomores finished forming their class teams and they seemed ready to schedule the challenge game, but there was a delay. Personal issues called Hedges off campus³⁷ and Joe Dyer refused to play without him.³⁸ The two teams agreed to postpone their game until he returned.

While they waited, a bigger delay occurred. Winter arrived early as heavy storms rolled down from Canada. The campus grounds, covered in a deep layer of snow, had become impassible. Outdoor activities were cancelled. Snowbound students turned their competitive impulses toward playing poker in the dormitory,³⁹ and the freshmen and sophomores agreed to postpone their football game until the weather cleared up in the spring.

Some people began to fear that the game would never be played. All through the winter the *Lantern* published articles on the topic of football to keep people thinking about the sport. The articles covered football at Harvard, football at Yale, football at Princeton, etc.⁴⁰ In March a *Lantern* writer named Emma Boyd reminded her readers directly that “the Sophomore and Freshman classes are to have a foot ball contest this Spring.”⁴¹ She then offered her hope that the game would inspire others on campus to play and “promote a legitimate indulgence in what is already THE college game of America.”⁴²

Chester Aldrich then began to promote a more ambitious idea. In January the managing editor of the *Lantern* had put Aldrich in charge of the newspaper’s “Local Notes” column. In February Aldrich argued in his column that the time had come to form a varsity football team—a team of students who would compete against other schools and represent the entire university. The Ohio State students had only ever faced intercollegiate athletic competition with their varsity baseball team but Aldrich argued that football offered the same opportunities. “There is also plenty of good metal out of which can be formed a foot ball team that would do credit to the O. S. U.,” he said. “Let us have a Varsity team that would do honor to its name.”⁴³ He repeated his call for a varsity football team in another column one month later.⁴⁴

Varsity sports were usually under the authority of a student organization named the Ohio State University Athletic Association. The Athletic Association had intended to field a varsity football team from the start but they had never succeeded in forming one. In 1881 the Association established three standing committees—one for baseball, one for football, and one for general athletics.⁴⁵

That first year no football team was formed. The following year the committee did no better, and the *Lantern* asked, “Where is the foot-ball? What a grand game could be had on the campus.”⁴⁶ When no progress was made in the third year that *Lantern* began to plead that “a first-class foot-ball team be organized at once.... We ought to challenge our neighbors to measure their ability with us in that line. It would be a splendid advertisement for the university.”⁴⁷ After that year, the ineffectual football committee was dropped. By the time Chester Aldrich began calling for varsity football during the winter of 1886 the Association had long since given up on that plan.

Over the years Ohio State students had tried to establish varsity teams in many sports—baseball, bicycling, rifle, rowing, and more.⁴⁸ Other than baseball none of these teams lasted more than a season. Students always formed their teams while caught up in the excitement of each new project but by the following year that early excitement always cooled. No one was more frustrated than a student named William Stowe Devol, a senior who had watched his cricket team, his archery team, and his equestrian team disappear.⁴⁹ The Athletic Association’s failure to maintain varsity sports was a recurring topic of conversation throughout the 1880s.⁵⁰

The loss of teams cost the students opportunities to compete against other schools, and losing those opportunities hurt the school’s ability to maintain any intercollegiate rivalries. Ohio State students did have rivalries with other colleges in the state but their interactions with those schools were fairly limited. With few opportunities for intercollegiate competition, the students identified most immediately with their various campus organizations—their clubs, their fraternities, and, especially, their graduating classes. The feelings of rivalry for Ohio State students were most often directed toward other Ohio State students.

As a result, the students did not have much school spirit.⁵¹ With varsity sports struggling there was little spark to keep the fires of school spirit burning. Only class spirit thrived. Aldrich spoke for many students who wanted a more intense emotional connection to their university. They wanted to feel pride in Ohio State as a way to feel pride in themselves. They wanted to feel superior to their college rivals. “Let us have some college spirit,”⁵² Aldrich pleaded.

Jumbo Hedges saw the value in Aldrich’s varsity football solution.

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In January 1886 a local Columbus attorney offered Joe Dyer an apprenticeship.⁵³ A legal apprenticeship was a path to law school that was quicker and surer

even than college. Dyer accepted the offer and withdrew from school. He later became a city prosecutor, and he eventually returned to Ohio State as a faculty member in the O.S.U. School of Law.⁵⁴

More immediately, however, Jumbo Hedges needed a new roommate. He offered Dyer's spot in his dorm room to a prep student named Charles Weybrecht. Weybrecht seemed not to have many other friends on campus. He weighed two hundred pounds and was saddled with the nickname "Fatty."⁵⁵ Chester Aldrich joked that when "Fatty" began rooming with "Jumbo" the school would have to empty the room below them, or at least add new building supports.⁵⁶ Weybrecht got even by dumping a bucket of water on Aldrich from the second-floor dorm room that he now shared with Hedges.⁵⁷

Dyer's withdrawal also meant that Hedges inherited the class presidency. "Jumbo now rules the Sophomore class meetings with an iron hand," read the news.⁵⁸ The sophomores held a special election and chose Aldrich as their new vice president.⁵⁹ These changes in leadership guided the events of the rest of the school year.

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In April the long winter finally ended and students who had been cooped up in their dormitories were anxious to stretch their legs.⁶⁰ They had spent months together with just each other to look at. The female students who attended the university were not permitted to live on campus⁶¹ and, with spring fever in the air, young men needed an outlet to release their pent-up high spirits.

On April 28, at just after 2 a.m., a group of sophomores snuck out of their dorm rooms and gathered in the darkness outside. Then they snuck into University Hall, the tallest building on campus, and climbed up into its tower. Above the tower they raised a flag—cherry and lavender, the sophomore class colors.⁶²

Under their flag they added a message directed to the junior class. The university's thirty juniors were the graduating class of 1887. Two years earlier, as freshmen, they had tried to raise their own flag above University Hall.⁶³ They had been stopped in the act, so for the new prank the sophomores—the class of '88—hung a banner with a message to remind everyone of that failure: "Wanted to but couldn't—'87."⁶⁴ Beneath that banner they hung an effigy of the junior class, wearing the junior class colors of olive-green and pink.⁶⁵

The juniors woke up the next morning to find the sophomore flag and taunting message flying together over the campus. Halbert Edwin Payne, the junior



University Hall as it would have looked just before the class of 1888 hung their flag.
(Photo courtesy of The Ohio State University Archives)

class president, was the best pitcher on the varsity baseball team. He was 5'11" and the *Lantern* described him as having the physique of Apollo.⁶⁶ Payne was not the type to back down from a challenge, and he knew that he would never hear the end of it if he let the sophomores get away with a prank this good at the juniors' expense. So he prepared a response.

At 8:00 a.m. the University Hall janitor took down the material hanging from the tower, and by 8:30 the juniors had the sophomores' cherry and lavender flag. At a quarter to noon the men of the class, clubs in hand and an oilcan ready, lined up double-file for a march across campus. At the front of their line was H.E. Payne. Just as they started their march, however, they found Jumbo Hedges blocking their path and shouting at Payne, demanding the return of the sophomore flag.⁶⁷

Students gathered around Hedges and the juniors, waiting to see what would happen. Fatty Weybrecht shook with a "passion for war" but he understood that as a prep student this was not his fight.⁶⁸ Chester Aldrich and Fred Ball both watched from a few yards away, Aldrich wearing his most expensive Victorian

three-piece suit. The juniors attempted to march around Hedges. Hedges reached out to them trying to take back the sophomore flag. As he extended his arm one of the juniors clubbed him across the face. Hedges staggered and his face was bloodied, but he managed to stand his ground. Then, as he regained his bearings, he began fighting back.⁶⁹

Hedges's classmates were too stunned to react until Fred Ball jumped into the fray. Ball quickly took a shot to the face similar to the one that struck Hedges. Ball fell, and on that cue the others sophomores swarmed. The juniors frantically swung their clubs at the charging sophomore bodies. The sophomores began wrestling the juniors to the ground. Chester Aldrich's fine clothes were left in tatters.⁷⁰

The two sides tugged at the sophomore flag until it ripped apart. The sophomores then turned their attention to the juniors' flag. The junior flag-bearer ran. That retreat disgusted H.E. Payne, who later said that if he had a rope he would have hung the coward.⁷¹ The sophomores chased the flag-bearer and the fighting stretched across campus. In the end the junior flag was also ripped apart and Hedges grabbed the largest piece to finally wipe the blood from his face.⁷²

A few days later, in his "Local Notes" column, Aldrich attempted to capture the moment:

The Seniors and ladies on the steps, and the professors from their windows, like the old men sitting on the walls of Troy, too weak to fight, watched the combatants on the campus below, asking who is this or that. He that towers above the others—can that be Hector? Yes, but they call him Jumbo.⁷³

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Diverse reactions to the campus battle soon appeared in the Columbus city newspapers. The *Columbus Dispatch*, a local daily, published the story that evening with an outraged headline: "Terrific Conflict Between the Juniors and Sophomores at State University: Bloody Faces and Bruised Heads."⁷⁴ The two classes "met in deadly conflict," they reported.⁷⁵ The *Dispatch's* competitor, the *Ohio State Journal*, took a much more cavalier, boys-will-be-boys tone the next morning: "Students At Play: State University Pupils Tumble Over One Another in Struggle for Colors."⁷⁶

The Ohio State students were inclined to embrace the second interpretation. After all, they did not see themselves as savages. The *Lantern* took the *State Journal's* interpretation a step further and proclaimed the incident a bonding experience and

celebrated it as a highlight of the year. They wrote that events of this kind give college life its “spice” and “seasoning,” and as a result of such skirmishes,

men come to know each other; to know another’s worth, and see their own failings; to have the corners rounded and ugly prominences knocked off; and, more than all, to learn what the English boys learn at Rugby and Oxford, to forget the individual and to feel and fight for the community.⁷⁷

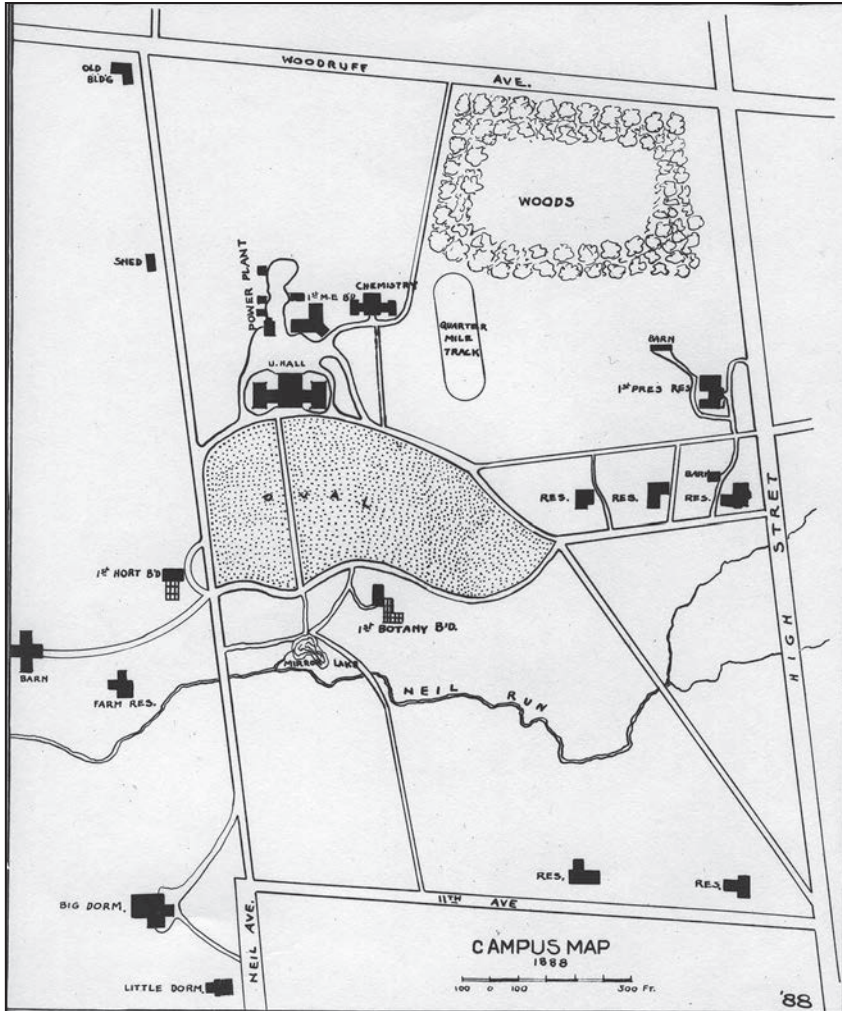
The freshmen were impressed by how well the battle turned out and wanted a piece of the action. Chester Aldrich even dared them: “The Freshmen have had an example set to them of the way they should go when they arrive at the proper age.”⁷⁸ A few days later Jesse Lee Jones and Frank Raymund led a group of their classmates up the tower to raise their own class flag.⁷⁹ Their colors were garnet and light blue. Jones and Raymund wanted to add a taunting message as part of their fun so they challenged the seniors. Then they signed their own names under their note to make sure that C.C. Sharp did not get the credit.

In the days that followed, the twenty members of the senior class, including William Stowe Devol, were tempted to respond, but by then the faculty had begun watching over the campus with increased scrutiny. With graduation only weeks away, the seniors had the good sense to try to keep their noses clean. The sophomores scoffed that the freshman prank had failed to steal their class’s spotlight.⁸⁰

Yet everyone had grudging respect that the freshmen ringleaders had been bold enough, or foolish enough, to personally sign their work.⁸¹ True to the prediction made by the *Lantern*, the classes were never closer.

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For Jumbo Hedges and Chester Aldrich this moment of campus unity felt like an opportunity, and they used the opportunity to form a varsity football team.⁸² Hedges became the varsity manager and Aldrich became varsity captain, so Hedges recruited players while Aldrich ran the team’s practices. Hedges invited H.E. Payne from the junior class and Fatty Weybrecht from the prep program. Dominating the lineup, however, were the football players from the freshman and sophomore class teams. Among the freshmen were C.C. Sharp, Jesse Lee Jones, and Frank Raymund, as well as William Morrey, the leader of the freshman voting-bloc plot the previous fall. This football team was the first united under the colors of the university.⁸³



The Ohio State campus as it looked in the 1880s. (Photo courtesy of The Ohio State University Archives)

As manager, Hedges also had the responsibility of finding an opponent. This task proved much harder. No other school in central Ohio had a varsity football team. The only varsity football teams that were widely known at that time were those at the major schools in the East—Harvard, Princeton, Columbia,

and Yale—and none of those established teams were likely to accept a challenge from an upstart like Ohio State. Even if an Eastern school might have accepted, the cost for an O.S.U. team to travel so far just to play a game would have been prohibitively expensive. As a result, the O.S.U. students continued to practice for a game that they did not really expect to play.

Within a few weeks the enthusiasm that had united the football team faded, just as it had faded for so many Ohio State teams before. Frank Raymund suffered an injury in one of the practices,⁸⁴ and his hobbling across campus for the next few weeks looked like it would be the only lasting consequence of varsity football's existence. Aldrich and Hedges hoped that their work would prove to be the start of something bigger but for the moment it had hit a dead end.

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Meanwhile the freshman and sophomore class football teams never played their challenge game. In the short-term excitement of forming a varsity team the class game was forgotten. Early the next fall the *Lantern* remembered the challenge and tried to revive interest in the game, but the moment had passed.⁸⁵

Chapter Two

Integrity, ability, energy, earnestness, and true worth

Jumbo Hedges and Chester Aldrich remained friends after the events that inspired the 1886 varsity football team.¹ When they became juniors the following fall, Hedges chose not to run for reelection as class president, letting Aldrich take a turn in office. Hedges participated in student government afterward as class sergeant-at-arms. A sergeant-at-arms maintained order in meetings and kept the members in line, and the position may have been the best use of his imposing presence. The *Lantern* described Aldrich's election as conducted "under the tender care of the fatherly 'Jumbo'."²

The North Dorm students continued to play pickup football that fall. Most of the students that Aldrich and Hedges had brought into their short-lived varsity team continued to participate in the more informal games on the North Dorm field. Fred Ball, Frank Raymund, C.C. Sharp, and Jesse Lee Jones all returned.³ Only a few members of the spring team were no longer playing football.

One was the former voting-bloc leader William Morrey. Morrey did not usually play football because he lived in the South Dorm.⁴ The South Dorm, or Little Dorm, was only a block away from the North Dorm but it had a separate culture. Ohio State's football tradition remained specific to the North Dorm.

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In most places at that time someone like Hedges was unlikely to interact with someone as wealthy as Aldrich, and the two were less likely to become friends, but Ohio State students took pride in how their school was able to mix people from any background. One of the seven members of the university's board of trustees was Peter Humphries Clark, an African American political activist.⁵

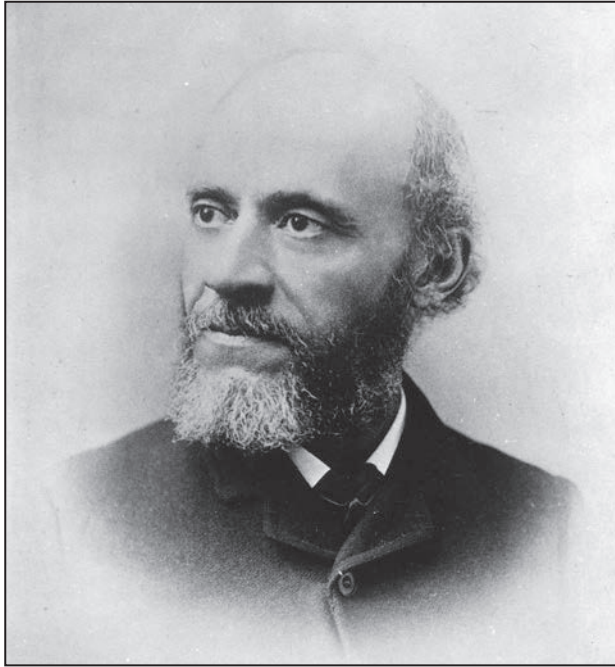


William Morrey, middle row, wearing a boater (second from right), poses with his fellow South Dorm residents. (Photo courtesy of The Ohio State University Archives)

The students bragged that the social categories that usually held people apart meant nothing to them. “Here the rich and poor mingle together,” wrote the *Lantern* in 1884, “with no other distinctions than those of integrity, ability, energy, earnestness, and true worth.”⁶

Like many members of his generation, Hedges had been the first in his family to go to college. The Ohio State University owed its existence to the Land-Grant College Act of 1862, a Congressional act that gave grants to states to fund colleges and universities. Less wealthy Americans found educational opportunities through these newly opening Land-Grant colleges.⁷ Ohio’s Land-Grant College did not even charge tuition. Ohio residents needed only a high school diploma and a qualifying exam score to enter. The state legislature established the school in 1870, just north of the state capital, with a focus was on scientific training, and the school’s faculty first welcomed students in 1873.⁸ Hedges enrolled for a degree in agriculture, with a career plan in agricultural technology.

Not every student who entered the university was successful. A freshman named William Beatty was a very good campus athlete but he was a poor student.



Peter Humphries Clark, of the original Ohio State board of trustees. (Photo courtesy of The Ohio State University Archives)

Like C.C. Sharp, he had played on the varsity baseball team as a prep student, and he had been recruited to the varsity football team in the spring.⁹ He also held the school record in the 100-yard dash and had held that record for many years.¹⁰ He originally had been a member of the class of 1887 but he failed enough coursework as a freshman that the faculty set him back, first into the class of 1888 and then into the class of 1889.¹¹ His father was General John Beatty, a decorated Civil War hero, former United States Congressman, and long-time supporter of the university. General Beatty had helped his son stay in college but after a third unsuccessful freshman year the general arranged for his son to get a job.¹²

Congress required states accepting funds from the Land-Grant College Act to provide training in “the agricultural and mechanical sciences,” but the education offered beyond farming and technical training was left to the discretion of each state. Different states made different educational choices. Ohio’s farming community had wanted to use the funds to build a narrow agricultural and

mechanical college but the state's professional educators pushed for a broader and more comprehensive curriculum modeled on the research universities of Europe.

Ohio's governor in 1870, Rutherford B. Hayes, had hoped to appease both sides in the debate but his own position was closer to the educators'. He thought that Ohio lacked a college that was inclusive enough to represent the entire state, and building one became his primary consideration. He insisted that Ohio's new Land-Grant college should become the state's flagship school.¹³

When Ohio State was founded the state of Ohio already had thirty-four colleges and universities—more than any other state, more in fact than all the nations of Europe combined.¹⁴ Almost all of those schools were established with religious affiliations, each representing one of various specific sects. Ohio had once been at the heart of the early American frontier, as close to the Deep South as it was to New England. After the Revolutionary War, when the new government opened the Ohio Territory for settlement, settlers arrived there from throughout the nation. They were as diverse a people as found anywhere in the United States at that time. They were Baptist, Methodist, and Congregationalist. They were Presbyterian, Episcopalian, and Unitarian. They were Lutheran, Mennonite, Evangelical, Roman Catholic, Quaker, Pentecostal, Jewish, and on and on, varying from one city or town to the next.¹⁵ The first item of business for a new community was to build a house of worship. The second was to build a college, and the colleges usually reflected the sectarian religious affiliations of their founders.¹⁶

Governor Hayes envisioned a different purpose, and a different philosophy, for his state's new flagship school. Hayes had been baptized a Presbyterian and had attended an Episcopalian college, and more recently he had begun attending Methodist services with his wife, but he personally claimed no religious denomination.¹⁷ He believed that sectarianism was unnecessarily divisive.¹⁸ His goal for Ohio's Land-Grant College funds was to establish a school that would unite the state's people, to let them rally around their common bonds rather than be separated by their differences.¹⁹

For Hayes, this school was his chance to leave a lasting legacy as governor, and he became the guiding force behind the principles that he wanted it to represent.²⁰ After the school was founded he became its leading promoter.²¹ For his leadership some called Hayes the "Father of the Ohio State University," and he kept a paternal eye on the school's development even after he became the President of the United States.

The students echoed President Hayes's ambition that Ohio State be recognized as the state's flagship school. In fact being considered a flagship became a cornerstone of the Ohio State self-image. The students bragged about their school—mostly about the quality of its academic offerings compared to other schools in the state, especially in the sciences.

They similarly bragged about their level of religious tolerance. Non-Christians were not warmly embraced by the state's sectarian schools but Ohio State, by charter, welcomed any qualified applicant. A spirit of ecumenicalism became an explicit point of campus pride, just as President Hayes had hoped it would. The students emphasized that their school gave an education to "Gentile, Jew, all mortals great and small."²² They believed that broad-minded religious acceptance was part of what made them special and distinct. They believed it because President Hayes had said it was so.

An example of that acceptance was the friendship of Fred Ball and a student named Samuel Oppenheimer. Oppenheimer was well liked on campus for his quick wit and musical talent.²³ He also was the university's first Jewish student.²⁴ Like Ball, Oppenheimer was a member of the tennis team—he played as half of the team's featured doubles pair.²⁵ Also like Ball, he had been a member of the 1886 varsity football team. He had been the three-quarter back on the side opposite Ball. Even more than Chester Aldrich and Jumbo Hedges, Ball and Oppenheimer were unlikely friends in their state and in their era in many places outside their school. While Oppenheimer was an observant Jew, Ball was the devout president of the campus Young Men's Christian Association. Ball, however, did not believe that religion should ever be imposing or judgmental. As he put it, he thought churches should "teach more and preach less."²⁶

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The boastful self image that defined Ohio State's students also influenced how they approached sports.²⁷ As much as they wanted to be respected for their academic offerings and broad-minded values, they equally wanted to be considered the state's leader in physical activity and athletic prowess. Opportunities to participate in intercollegiate sports were rare, but the students saw those opportunities as yet another way to prove their flagship status.

Despite the North Dorm's passion for football, the most popular sport at the university overall had always been baseball. The North Dorm was home to

a quarter of the Ohio State student body but baseball was “the national pastime” and “America’s great sport.”²⁸ Back in the 1870s Ohio State students formed a campus Baseball Association, and that Baseball Association then formed the school’s first varsity team.²⁹ When students formed a broader Athletic Association in 1881, the new Association needed to annex the baseball team in order for anyone to take it seriously. The *Lantern* asked everyone to support the Athletic Association by forming teams in as many sports as they could, but it also made a point of assuring the baseball purists that the focus of sports at Ohio State would always “be centered on the base-ball nines.”³⁰

Ohio State’s first intercollegiate athletic competition was a baseball game in the spring of 1881. The opponent was Capital University, a Lutheran school in Bexley, a suburb on the east side of Columbus. Ohio State won 8 to 5. It was the last time the students used a nickname that they had used during the 1870s: the Ohio State Franklins.³¹ The name referred to the fact that their campus was located in Franklin County. When the team started to compete against other colleges, however, the students insisted that their flagship State University should never be portrayed as local.

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Because student pride at Ohio State was based on attending the state’s flagship school, the students became defensive whenever anyone seemed to look down on their university. They feared being thought of as just an agricultural college—as merely a trade school for farmers.³² Students from other schools often gave the O.S.U. students opportunities to feel defensive. Those students found the bragging at Ohio State insufferable, demonstrating an inflated self-image that they saw as totally unearned.

The students from those schools particularly resented Ohio State’s funding. Although the university’s funding originated from the federal government, its continuing endowment officially came out of the state treasury. The resentment was greatest at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, (where they had been expecting the Land-Grant funds for themselves³³) but it was also seen at other older, established colleges throughout the state. Among the most vocal critics of Ohio State were the students at the University of Cincinnati, founded in 1819. The University of Cincinnati student newspaper, the *Academica*, wrote of Ohio State in 1885, “It may be jealousy on our part to say that we do not see any reason why this institution, whose

courses of study are not more than a year or two in advance of those of our High Schools... should continue to receive appropriations in the future.”³⁴

The editor-in-chief of the *Lantern* in the fall of 1885 was a junior named Vernon Emery. Early in 1886, after Emery discovered what the *Academica* had written, he responded with an angry 500-word essay. By this time a new student had taken the reins as the newspaper’s editor-in-chief, but Emery’s name was put back in the masthead for one more issue in order to put the full weight and authority of the *Lantern* behind his piece.

Emery insisted that the *Academica* writers had their facts wrong. He said that they must have confused Ohio State’s collegiate programs with its prep school. He explained that “graduates of the High Schools of Cincinnati are able to enter our Freshman class provided their High School work has prepared them for the course they wish to pursue” but high school graduates who are not properly prepared “must make up their back work in our preparatory department.” He emphasized that, unlike the University of Cincinnati, no one had ever graduated from Ohio State in less than four years. He then added that the *Academica* writers must have had their thinking clouded by all of the breweries in Cincinnati, and concluded, “If you ever should get outside the limits of Cincinnati, if you will come to Columbus we will show you what a university is like.”³⁵

The defensiveness of the O.S.U. students was still on display one year later. In the spring of 1887 the university held a campus event, featuring distinguished state dignitaries making lofty speeches to celebrate its mission, and the *Lantern* promoted the event with a call to action. A new editor-in-chief, named J.A. Wilgus, wrote, “It is time to dispel the notion which so many people have that the O. S. U. is a third rate agricultural college away back in the woods.”³⁶

Meanwhile Ohio’s farming community, which had been upset with the state government for allowing the university to have a mission that was broader than farming education, continued to be upset even after the university was founded. They had never embraced President Hayes’s plan to establish an academic flagship and they criticized the university for swindling funds that they still argued had been allocated specifically for the agricultural and mechanical sciences. The O.S.U. students defended their school against those attacks as well.³⁷

The most hostile criticism of Ohio State, however, came from the state’s religious institutions.³⁸ Many wanted Ohio’s colleges to continue to maintain clear sectarian designations and they denounced the new secular state university as

“atheistic.”³⁹ Ohio State students regularly described such critics as “theologues” who demanded that all of life be viewed through the narrow prism of religion and ecclesiastic study. Far from fulfilling President Hayes’s dream of uniting the state, in the early years of the university few issues in Ohio were more divisive.

Ohio State students claimed that all of these criticisms arose from small-minded intolerance and bias. In reaction they re-emphasized their own claims of tolerance and broad-mindedness. In addition to bragging that their school had no religious qualifications or divisions based on social class, they congratulated themselves for their lack of prejudice when “colored” students first arrived on campus, brought in by the trustee Peter Humphries Clark.⁴⁰ They also ridiculed the more conservative schools struggling with the issue of women’s education, noting that Ohio State had been chartered from the start as coeducational.⁴¹

They especially enjoyed mocking the “theologues” who accused them of impiety. Ohio State’s first athletic fight song dated from the 1870s and the only accomplishment that it bragged about was the amount of swearing done by the baseball team.⁴² The school yearbook, the *Makio*, was named after a mythical Japanese pool that was supposed to reveal a viewer’s fate in its reflection,⁴³ and the yearbook staff occasionally illustrated the *Makio* with a smiling devil welcoming their fellow students to Hell.⁴⁴ The Ohio State students may have felt dismissed as mere farm school apprentices “away back in the woods,” but they prided themselves as the most intellectually free men in the state.

The most explicit statement of the student credo would be written for the *Makio* in 1897:

The University has been a seat of intellectual freedom. Thought has breathed here the inspiring air of liberty. The University has no political or religious tests; applies none, acknowledges none. For students the criteria have been moral soundness and a power and willingness to work. Its teachers have been elected because of their qualifications, without regard to their ecclesiastical or political affiliations. This atmosphere of freedom has been a principal condition of the strong and constant progressive spirit that has always pervaded the institution. True intellectual and moral progress is possible only where liberty prevails. To nothing else is freedom so essential as to thought.⁴⁵

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After the game against Capital in 1881, Ohio State’s next three intercollegiate baseball games were all in 1882, against other schools with sectarian religious



Image from the front of the 1887 Makio. (Photo courtesy of The Ohio State University Archives)

affiliations. Two were against Otterbein University, an Evangelical school in the nearby town of Westerville.⁴⁶ The third was against Ohio Wesleyan University, a Methodist school in the town of Delaware, twenty miles north of Columbus.⁴⁷ The two games against Otterbein rotated home fields, the first in Westerville and the second at Ohio State, but Ohio Wesleyan always had to play their games at home in Delaware. The Wesleyan faculty were extremely strict and protective, never letting their students participate in sports off campus. They believed that visits to non-Methodist campuses offered unacceptable temptations.⁴⁸

The Ohio Wesleyan students always presented themselves as pious and serious-minded. The school's official student newspaper, the *Transcript*, featured religious sermons on the front page and other theological observations inside. They also had an alternate newspaper, the *Practical Student*, but it was no less devoted to religious content. Ohio Wesleyan students generally regarded the Ohio State students as blasphemous sinners and reprobates. Ohio State students generally regarded the Wesleyan students as self-righteous prigs. The two schools were natural rivals.

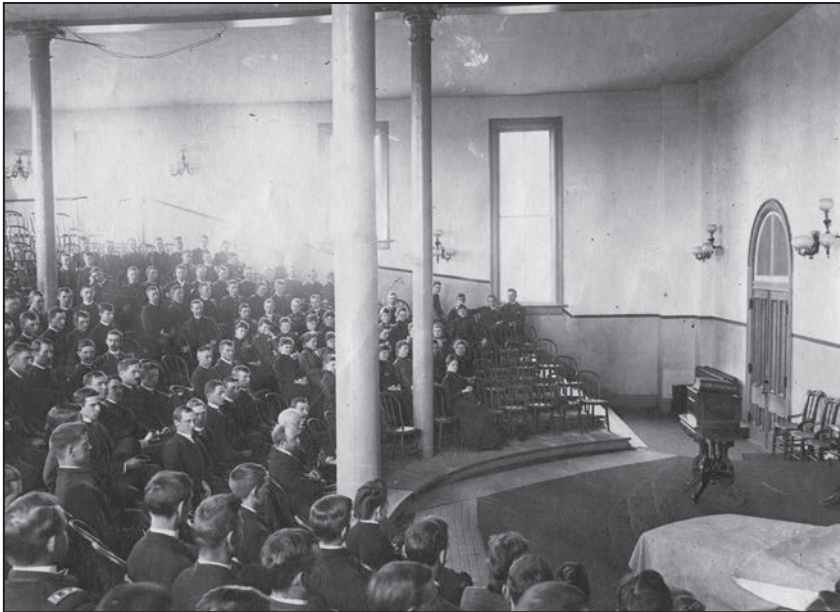
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The irreverent attitude of the Ohio State students had put them at odds with the school's board of trustees almost immediately. In 1881 the board was under pressure from political interests in the state who were upset over the school's alleged offenses against God and farming. Those political interests had leverage in the state government to block the university's funding and the board was anxious to appease them.

As part of that appeasement the board required students to attend daily chapel services, including the reading of scriptures and a faculty-led prayer. This chapel policy was to be enforced through a demerit system. Each missed service would lead to one demerit and a student would be expelled after he or she reached the maximum demerits allowed.

The students saw the new chapel policy as an unacceptable change to the mission of the university. A *Lantern* editorial stated, "Our former policy was one of strict neutrality upon all religious matters. Each student was left to use his own judgment as to whether he should recognize religion in any of its forms."⁴⁹ The article concluded, "Certainly it would be hard to improve on such a policy."⁵⁰

The students were most annoyed that the action of the board pandered to a stereotype that they saw as demeaning. The only valid reason for a chapel



A mandatory Ohio State chapel service, held in University Hall in the 1880s. (Photo courtesy of The Ohio State University Archives)

requirement at Ohio State, the *Lantern* argued, was if the moral character of the students was defective. They said that their school actually had a higher moral tone than other schools in the state: “We have been comparatively free from drunkenness and rowdyism, and all those petty meannesses that we see chronicled of the students of other colleges.”⁵¹

The students were supported in their complaints against the chapel policy by most of the faculty. Many O.S.U. professors believed that compelling students at a public institution to attend religious services violated the Constitutional separation of church and state. Edward Orton, a geology professor, had been president of the university since it opened its doors in 1873. His namesake Orton Hall has since become the centerpiece of the Ohio State campus, with generations of alumni holding nostalgic memories of the chimes ringing from its tower.⁵² Orton resigned as president in 1881 rather than administer the chapel rule.⁵³

The trustees quickly hired Walter Quincy Scott to replace Orton as president. In addition to being a professor of political economy, Scott was also a

Presbyterian minister. The change had little effect, however. Where President Orton had actively refused to enforce the chapel policy, President Scott simply took no action on it.⁵⁴

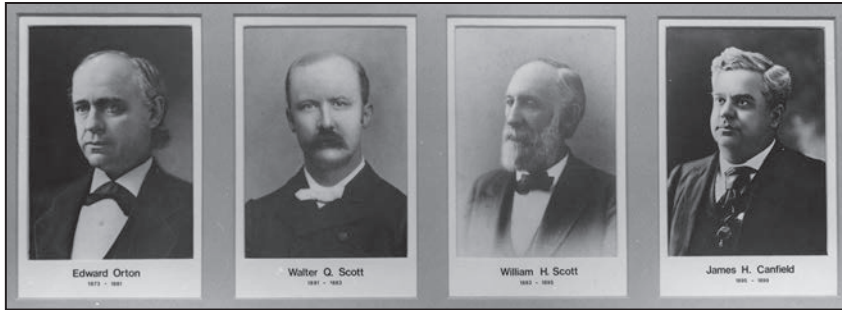
President Scott became a popular figure among the O.S.U. students but he became a problem for the trustees. Even worse than his indifference to the chapel policy, the trustees discovered that he advocated a radical theory of property. He argued that property rights should be limited entirely to the goods that an individual produces. No property should be inherited, he said, and land and other natural resources should be owned communally. This position outraged the farming community and the trustees fired him in the spring of 1883. The firing stirred passionate protests from the students but the board had already hired a replacement.⁵⁵

When students returned in the fall of 1883 they discovered a new president: William Henry Scott. The new President Scott (no relation to the first) was a Methodist minister, and he insisted that the school offer Christian values. He had six children and he intended to send them all to Ohio State.⁵⁶ This President Scott finally authorized the enforcement of the chapel rule.

Many members of the faculty still believed that compelling students at a state university to attend religious services was unconstitutional, and they sought the advice of Ohio's attorney general. The United States Supreme Court would ban compulsory prayers at state-funded schools in 1962 but in 1883 there was no such precedent. The attorney general assured the faculty that the trustees were entirely within their rights.⁵⁷

Students arguing the issue took a different approach. A letter published in the *Lantern* that fall called on the board to look beyond the law and respect the principle that guided American separation of church and state. "We do not undertake to discuss the question as to whether the introduction of religion into the public schools is constitutional or not, but merely as to whether it would be advisable or not even if constitutional."⁵⁸ The letter went on:

When we call our schools public, we mean that they are for all, and not for any particular class. The introduction of religion will certainly drive one class away. It is not a conjecture, but a well known result, that has occurred over and over again, and may be expected just as to-morrow's sun is. For this reason, and this reason only, should religion be kept strictly out of the public schools; but it is a sufficient one in itself.⁵⁹



The first four presidents of the Ohio State University. (Photo courtesy of The Ohio State University Archives)

On campus this argument was considered well-reasoned, thoughtful, and eloquent, but if any of the trustees read it, it did not move them to change their minds. For them, the only relevant issue was their belief that the chapel policy assured the continuation of the university's funding. For others off campus, the outraged response at Ohio State only confirmed the reputation of the students there as godless.

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After the three baseball games in 1882 the Ohio State team did not play another intercollegiate game until 1884. The opponent in that game was the University of Wooster. Wooster was a Presbyterian school founded in the town of Wooster, Ohio, and their students, led by a good pitcher named Kinley McMillan, fielded the best amateur baseball team in the state. The Ohio State students thought that their most ambitious sports goals were suddenly within reach when such a respected opponent agreed to come down to Columbus for a game.

The game was scheduled for Decoration Day (as Memorial Day was known in the nineteenth century) and was set to be played at Recreation Park in downtown Columbus. Recreation Park was the home field of the Columbus Buckeyes, the city's professional baseball team. The pro Buckeyes would be in Baltimore playing the Orioles on Decoration Day, so the Park would be empty. The manager of the Ohio State team decided to rent it for the game.

Ohio State lost to McMillan 11 to 4,⁶⁰ but more significant than the score was the aftermath. The team had overestimated how attractive the game would

be to ticket-buying locals from the city, and they lost most of the money that they had spent in renting the Park. They asked for help to pay for the losses but the Athletic Association turned them down. The team was furious and they began to question the value of their affiliation with the Association. Soon afterward they seceded.⁶¹

That decision led to disaster. The team reestablished a separate Baseball Association and moved back under it, but the baseball association that they founded was not up to the challenge of supporting an intercollegiate schedule. In the spring of 1885 Wooster invited Ohio State up to their campus for a rematch, but Wooster was 100 miles away and the travel was too expensive for the team to make the trip. In fact the team could no longer afford to travel at all. Everyone recognized the source of the problem but they could not find a solution. In October 1885 the Athletic Association and the Baseball Association tried to renegotiate a merger, but they were unable to come to terms.⁶²

The only baseball played by the Ohio State team during the 1884–85 school year were a pair of games against the soldiers from a Columbus military barracks.⁶³ The team's sole game the following spring was on May 30, 1886, again facing the same barracks soldiers.⁶⁴ The Baseball Association also began sponsoring class teams that year, and the games played by those class teams were generally considered more interesting than the games played by the varsity. To play against a military barracks did not inspire much passion but when class teams faced each other every contest was a rivalry game.

Chester Aldrich attended the May 30 game but his primary interest was seeing an old friend from Ashtabula named Scott Webb play second base. Aldrich had once been a member of a North Dorm baseball team but by 1886 he had become more interested in football. It was during this time that he was forming the varsity football team with Jumbo Hedges.

During the following school year, 1886–87, the Baseball Association was not able to schedule any varsity baseball games at all. The students saw their situation as ridiculous. They had an Athletic Association that could not hold onto any varsity teams and a Baseball Association that could not schedule any varsity games. The seniors who were preparing to graduate in the spring of 1887 had not seen Ohio State face another school in any athletic competition since the Wooster game in the spring of 1884, when they were freshmen.

Frustration was growing. The failure to compete in intercollegiate sports left many feeling impotent. The feeling was especially gnawing given the students' vision of their school as the state's flagship. The 1886 varsity football team might have helped ease that frustration if it had survived, or even if it had ever faced a single intercollegiate opponent.

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In the fall of 1886, Jumbo Hedges's friend Fatty Weybrecht was among the students who was no longer playing football at the North Dorm. Weybrecht had not returned to school that year. His father had become ill and Weybrecht had stayed home in Alliance, Ohio, to take care of his family.⁶⁵ Reports appeared in the *Lantern* over the next few months discussing whether he was likely to return, and those reports as often as not included jokes about his weight.⁶⁶ During Christmas break that year Hedges visited Weybrecht in Alliance instead of returning to his own home in Urbana, and he convinced his friend to return to school.⁶⁷ Weybrecht enrolled at the start of the 1887 winter term and the *Lantern* welcomed him back by joking, "We are happy to say that he still retains his beautiful form."⁶⁸

Hedges and Chester Aldrich were the co-leaders of the junior class, regardless of what titles they officially held.⁶⁹ As leaders they felt obliged to express their opinions on campus issues, including the chapel policy. They each made a point of missing just enough chapel services, and earning just enough demerits, to approach the threshold of expulsion.⁷⁰ Their protest was purely symbolic, however. Even they did not dare cross that final line.