



# A History of Homecoming at Blake

by Jan Woolman

*The 1968 Homecoming court*

6

Feature

**H**omecoming — the pep fest, the football game, the floats, the royalty, the dance — a seemingly timeless tradition plays out at The Blake School every fall. But it took several decades for the event to become what a 1959 Blake student newspaper, *The Blake Torch*, called “... the most important athletic and social event of the fall term.”

In 1927, Blake’s first graduate, Fred Boutell ’13, proposed the school invite alumni to a football game. “Bring your colors and megaphones,” said the brown and white invitation. A crowd of about 500 braved snow-covered ground and a cold wind to watch this November 11 homecoming game against Blake’s archrival, St. Paul Academy. Blake lost the game 12-0, but *The Blake Torch* deemed the event a success:

“The day of the game found cars solidly parked on four sides of the field, and spectators thronging the side lines. This crowd, despite inclement weather, surely put to rout any possible question of the Alumni interest at Blake.”

Two days later local Blake alumni reciprocated the invitation. As described in an alumni newsletter, the event raises eyebrows even today:

---

***“The first Homecoming dance, after the 1942 SPA game, featured Bud Strawn and his orchestra, known for its ‘smooth sweet arrangements, as well as for his torrid jive.’”***

---

“On November 13, Saturday, Lyman Wakefield entertained football lettermen and the coaches at a duck dinner ... Then the boys brave-

ly attacked a formidable array of assorted cigars, cigarettes and chocolate dipped bon bons.”

By the 1930s, the fall gathering was an annual event. In 1932, the school designated a game against Owatonna’s Pillsbury school “Homecoming,” and students decorated the goal posts. The most important game of the season continued to be against SPA, and whenever this contest was at home, it was Homecoming.

Blake’s Homecoming soon included more features — a pep fest, a reception with doughnuts, coffee and hot chocolate for alumni and visitors, and cheerleaders. In 1935, George Clifford ’38 and Frank Donaldson ’38 promised “... some new cheers” as well as “old ones with fresh vigor.” In 1939, a special edition of the *Blake Torch* displayed photos of the competing teams and a banner headline of the winning Homecoming slogan, “SHEAR SHATTUCK.” Subsequent winners included then-senior David Bull’s 1942 “Maul St. Paul!” and 1948 grad and future head of Blake Randy Brown’s 1944 “Let’s Make Hay of SPA.”

The 1940 Blake Union proposed a Homecoming dance, but due to football coach Mike Horne’s tough training rules, it could not take place until after the last game of the season. So, a football dance followed the SPA game on November 8, instead of the earlier Homecoming game against Pillsbury. Bob Hall’s orchestra played in the library, and a Coke concession drew dancers to the trophy room.

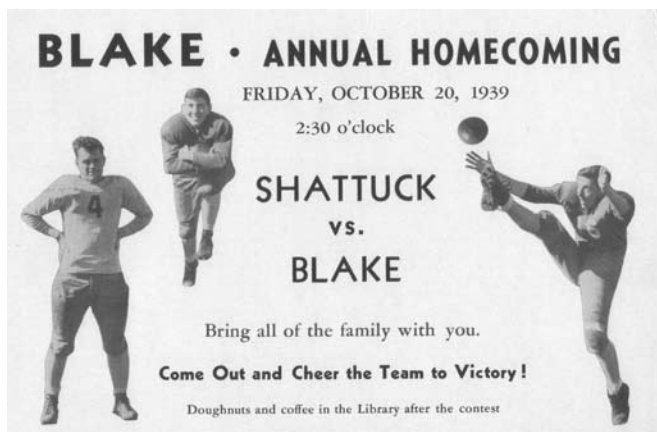
The first Homecoming dance, after the 1942 SPA game, featured Bud Strawn and his orchestra, known for its “smooth sweet arrangements, as well as for his torrid

jive.” Football lettermen with or without dates attended free of charge; the price of admission for others was \$1.25 per couple and \$1.50 per stag. Punch was served because of a wartime shortage of Coke.

In the postwar era elaborate decorations enhanced the dances. For the event on October 19, 1952, “... red and white floodlights, twisted streamers, and a hundred balloons, one of which contained a dollar bill” transformed the field house.

At some point, a new raucous attraction — a drag queen — enlivened halftime. According to the October 22 Torch:

“At the half the usual unpredictable antics of the Homecoming Queen will burst forth in all their regal splendor. Who knows who this gracious beauty will be? Success for this year’s Queen is assured if ‘she’ receives one-fourth the applause accorded Bub Mackall’s striptease last year.”



*This Homecoming invitation went out to alums and families in 1939.*

And in 1944:

“This year’s vision of radiant beauty and charm who will represent the school will be none other than Charlie Horn (it is rumored). The Queen will arrive at the game during the half accompanied by her retainers in a long, black, high-powered limousine.”

The first female queen appeared in 1947. “Yes, sir, a real girl ...” touted the October 3 Blake Torch. “Matt Loulek’s fine convertible ... roared onto the playing field during the half, laden with its precious cargo.” Kathleen Gill was the first queen, and her attendants were Mary Russell and Sally Warner ’48. Having a “real queen” became popular, and individual photos of the young women and descriptions of their physical attributes soon supplanted information about the football team on the front page of the Homecoming Blake Torch.

An editorial in the October 2, 1964, Blake Torch denounced this emphasis on appearance, noting, “... if all the sophomores, juniors and seniors want is a dumb doll to ogle at half time, it is their prerogative. But they shouldn’t be so cruel as to deceive the girl by letting her believe the queenship is an honor rather than a poor joke.” Although the Homecoming Torches continued to feature large pictures of the queen and her attendants, by the late 1960s, the write-ups focused on activities and achievements.

Queens and attendants received flowers from the headmaster during halftime — a ringlet of roses for Judy Cleveland, the 1952 queen, and a formal coronation occurred during the dance.

By the early 1970s, changes within and without the Blake community pushed Homecoming in different directions. National events and school controversies, such as the conflict over Blake haircuts, drew attention away from Homecoming festivities. Reflecting the growth of other fall sports, the 1970 Homecoming added soccer and cross-country contests. Many queens, attendants and cheerleaders were Northrop students, but as the merger approached, the girls school became more directly involved in Homecoming festivities. The 1969 final field hockey match between “Blues” and “Whites,” for example, was dubbed “Homecoming” and included a king, Bob Cohen ’70, as well as “a bustling bevy of Blake attendants.” In 1972, Northrop students had lunch on the Hopkins campus and then played the annual field hockey competition before the football game.

The 1974 merger brought more changes — kings and male attendants, bonfires and ensuing controversies, carnation sales, dress up days — and then later, Convocation, Legacy Day and reunion weekend became part of that special fall event — Homecoming.



*As Homecoming slogan winner in 1949, then-Blake faculty member Jack Edie earned the honor of kissing the queen.*



*Northrop students have their own Homecoming showdown during the Blue and White field hockey game in 1972.*