

In the Days of Your Going Away

They were the first senior class to see football games in Kenan. And they were nearly the last to graduate amid the economic and social high times that roared off toward the unimaginable hardships of the next decade.

Their gift has long since drifted into obscurity — partly dislocated by a big building and lost to time. It was as simple as it was elegant: a last stroll on the verge of summer along a sand-colored Carolina dirt path beneath a canopy of Arboretum trees.

On Class Day, June 8, 1928, the 327 members of the senior class gathered at the Old Well, processed to the shadow of the Davie Poplar for ceremonies to open the four-day Commencement weekend, then walked together from the Graham Memorial eastward on the border of the Arb on Hillsborough Street at the back of Spencer dorm, where they stopped to sing *Hark the Sound*.

This was the Senior Walk, dedicated that day by Frank Porter Graham (class of 1909), then a history professor two years away from the school's presidency. Arboretum creator William Coker had a row of Japanese cherry trees planted for the occasion.

Graham told the seniors: "In the very days of your going away, you are staying behind in the spirit of the gift of this walk set aside today in your name to become a tradition of the University and to be cherished by the classes coming in for a life beyond your own."

Old Chapel Hillians said the class of '28 merely formalized a notion that had been around since nearly the turn of that century. Louis Graves (class of 1902), who founded *The Chapel Hill Weekly*, said the

idea came about gradually — the story that's been passed down goes that a "wealthy student from New York," one Henry S. Lake (class of

1898) gave the money for construction of a running track that evolved into a bicycle track that circled the campus. Part of the path eventually was widened and came to be known as the Senior Walk.

It was mentioned for years afterward in student poetry and news stories — and one classified ad for a lost wallet.

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Editorialists squawked when the lamps along the walk went out because it formed the principal route to class for the female residents of

Spencer, Alderman, McIver and Kenan.

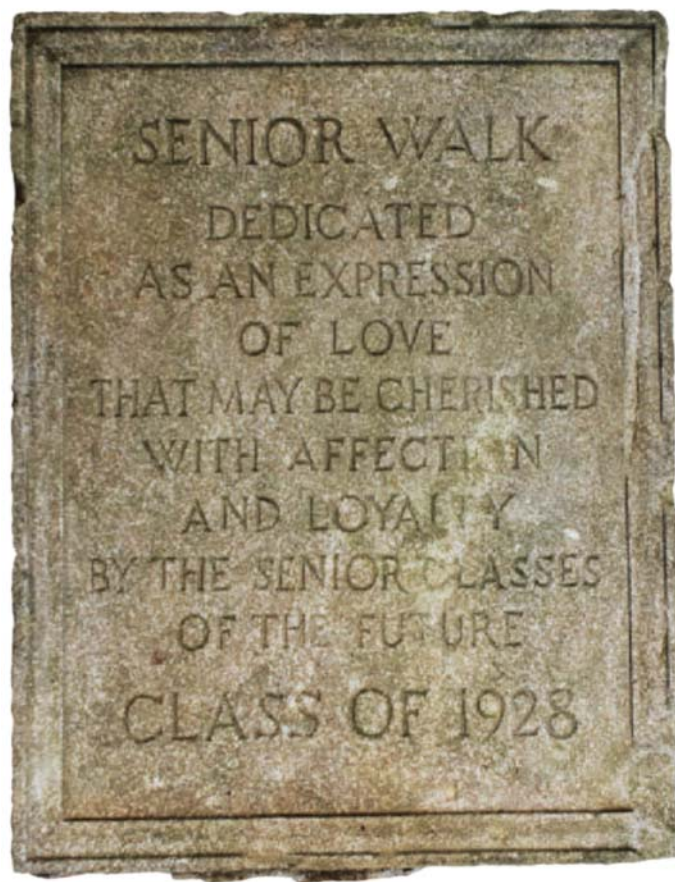
A *Daily Tar Heel* quiz in 1948 asked, "Where is Senior Walk?" The answer was: "The Planetarium is blocking it." Indeed, the Morehead Building necessitated a slight rerouting that didn't go over well with townspeople or students. But most likely, the Arboretum part of the walk was the main attraction. Students still used the term in the 1960s.

The walk was marked in 1928 with a sandstone monument. *The DTH* says it was "near the entrance of the Arboretum and at the far end of the Morehead parking lot." At some point, the thing took leave of Chapel Hill, just as seniors do. The theory is it was dug up when the Morehead Building was expanded in the early 1970s, and somebody made it their prize.

It made it as far as Chatham County. Linda Carnes-McNaughton, an archeologist who has a 1997 doctorate in anthropology from UNC, late last year contacted her old mentor, Steve Davis '74, associate director of UNC's archeology research labs, and said a neighbor had found a stone marker partially buried in her yard.

It's in safekeeping now, with plans being laid to put it back in the ground somewhere beside the bricks that line the yet-undisturbed east end of the Senior Walk.

— David E. Brown '75





JASON D. SMITH '94

A sandstone monument given by the class of 1928 made a decades-old tradition official. Whoever made off with it, probably in the 1970s, worked for it — it's only 18 by 14 inches, but it's 6 inches thick. Plans are in the works to reinstall it somewhere along the walk. See bit.ly/SeniorWalkModel for a three-dimensional model. On the opposite page is an undated photo of part of the walk in the Arboretum.




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