



Spring 2010

## The Old Tin Cup

Nicholas T. Scerbo  
*Gettysburg College*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/hiddenpapers>

 Part of the [Public History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

**Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.**

---

Scerbo, Nicholas T., "The Old Tin Cup" (2010). *Hidden in Plain Sight Projects*. 26.  
<https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/hiddenpapers/26>

This open access student research paper is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact [cupola@gettysburg.edu](mailto:cupola@gettysburg.edu).

---

# The Old Tin Cup

## Description

The world of college football, always colorful and exciting, is perhaps at its best on chilly October Saturdays, with the stands packed for Homecoming. There is a grand parade, a Homecoming Queen, an exciting game between gridiron rivals prompting the large crowd to roar with delight as the hometown heroes march dramatically down the field to victory, or perhaps dig in to preserve the lead with time running out and their backs to their own goal. Perhaps a coveted trophy will be awarded to the winning team. Ceremonies will follow the game: a trophy presentation at midfield, in full view of the cheering fans, honors for the game's best players, and a barren spot in the trophy case filled, for at least one more year, with a much-desired symbol of victory. It is easy to imagine such a scene taking place in Notre Dame Stadium after an epic struggle with the University of Southern California, or perhaps as Stanford turns over the massive Stanford Axe to Cal after another edition of The Big Game. Maybe it is not so easy to imagine the Gettysburg Bullets gathering around their own trophy after a hard-fought triumph over their own in-state rivals, the Muhlenberg Mules. Yet in 1954 an attempt to create such a tradition did take place. While it never reached the heights of intensity that those great long-time rivalries did, a trophy called the Old Tin Cup spent eleven years as the prize for the victor's of the Gettysburg-Muhlenberg game. During that time, it was the focus of newspaper articles, parades, and even halftime ceremonies. [excerpt]

## Course Information:

- Course Title: *HIST 300: Historical Method*
- Academic Term: Spring 2010
- Course Instructor: Dr. Michael J. Birkner '72

*Hidden in Plain Sight* is a collection of student papers on objects that are "hidden in plain sight" around the Gettysburg College campus. Topics range from the Glatfelter Hall gargoyles to the statue of Eisenhower and from historical markers to athletic accomplishments. You can download the paper in pdf format and click "View Photo" to see the image in greater detail.

## Keywords

Gettysburg College, Hidden in Plain Sight, football, Gettysburg Bullets, Old Tin Cup, trophies, Muhlenberg Mules, sports rivalries

## Disciplines

Public History | United States History

## Campus Location

Bream Athletic Center

Gettysburg College

Hidden in Plain Sight

The Old Tin Cup

History 300

Historical Methods

Dr. Michael Birkner

By

Nicholas Scerbo

Spring 2010

The world of college football, always colorful and exciting, is perhaps at its best on chilly October Saturdays, with the stands packed for Homecoming. There is a grand parade, a Homecoming Queen, an exciting game between gridiron rivals prompting the large crowd to roar with delight as the hometown heroes march dramatically down the field to victory, or perhaps dig in to preserve the lead with time running out and their backs to their own goal. Perhaps a coveted trophy will be awarded to the winning team. Ceremonies will follow the game: a trophy presentation at midfield, in full view of the cheering fans, honors for the game's best players, and a barren spot in the trophy case filled, for at least one more year, with a much-desired symbol of victory. It is easy to imagine such a scene taking place in Notre Dame Stadium after an epic struggle with the University of Southern California, or perhaps as Stanford turns over the massive Stanford Axe to Cal after another edition of The Big Game. Maybe it is not so easy to imagine the Gettysburg Bullets gathering around their own trophy after a hard-fought triumph over their own in-state rivals, the Muhlenberg Mules. Yet in 1954 an attempt to create such a tradition did take place. While it never reached the heights of intensity that those great long-time rivalries did, a trophy called the Old Tin Cup spent eleven years as the prize for the victor's of the Gettysburg-Muhlenberg game. During that time, it was the focus of newspaper articles, parades, and even halftime ceremonies.

The story of that pageantry begins in October of 1954, just two weeks before Gettysburg's annual Homecoming game against Muhlenberg, with the discovery of an unusual letter from an old Gettysburg graduate. While cleaning out his personal files in preparation for his fast-approaching retirement, long-time Gettysburg Dean Wilbur Tilberg happened upon the letter, which was written in the winter of 1911. Oddly, the letter was unsigned and contained no

name by which to identify the writer. The author explained that he had played football at Gettysburg, and in 1911 had faced off against his brother, a Muhlenberg student, in that year's annual game between the two schools. Their father, a poor Pennsylvania Dutch farmer from just outside Allentown, had fallen in love with the sport while watching his sons play against each other, and decided to award his "most prized possession," a tin cup that had been in the family for generations, to whichever son played prevailed in their final game against each other.<sup>1</sup>

The game was tightly played, and neither team was able to score early. With time running out before the end of the first half, the unnamed author, who served as Gettysburg's kicker, managed to convert a key field goal, but was injured only a few plays later, and had to be helped off the field. In the purest spirit of what *The Gettysburgian* described as "brotherly rivalry," the author's brother left the Muhlenberg bench at the break, grabbed his father in the stands, and insisted that the cup be awarded to the author in honor of his gallant play during the first half. The father complied, and the two made their way to the Gettysburg bench, where they bestowed the precious heirloom upon the letter's author. His field goal proved to be the only score in the game; Gettysburg prevailed, 3-0. Although he realized that this game was the last in which he and his brother would face each other on the playing fields, the author felt that the spirit of their rivalry was something worth preserving. Rather than keep the cup as a decoration, he instead decided to donate it to the two schools as a permanent and travelling trophy, which he hoped would inspire Gettysburg and Muhlenberg to enjoy the same spirit of friendly competition that had existed between him and his brother. He asked that a halftime ceremony at each game

---

<sup>1</sup> "Deans Uncover Tin Cup Tradition of Ancient Bullet-Mule Encounters", *The Gettysburgian*, October 14, 1954

honor the most outstanding player of the first half, in the same way that the author's brother had honored him by surrendering his claim on the family's most prized possession.<sup>2</sup>

Muhlenberg proceeded to defeat Gettysburg in 1912 and 1913, 38-7 and 20-7, respectively, and so the Cup would have been in their possession when the series halted from 1914 to 1920.<sup>3</sup> When the rivalry was renewed in 1921, the Cup had been forgotten, and its story was lost. When Dean Tilberg found the letter, he was immediately convinced that the story was worth pursuing. Tilberg contacted Muhlenberg's dean, Henry Richards, and asked him to search for the tin cup itself, which he believed would still be on the Muhlenberg campus. Richards proceeded to search Muhlenberg's basements and trophy cases, and managed to find the original cup, exactly as Tilberg had hoped.<sup>4</sup> Excited and intrigued by this discovery, *The Gettysburgian* ran the story as front-page news on October 14<sup>th</sup>, two weeks before the game itself, and then again on October 21<sup>st</sup>. The October 21<sup>st</sup> issue of the paper, in fact, carried a photograph of the cup, and reported that *The Gettysburgian* and the *Muhlenberg Weekly* had worked together to mount the previously unadorned cup on a wooden base, plated with silver on which the score of each game would be inscribed.<sup>5</sup> It was to be an annual tradition, a permanent part of Gettysburg's homecoming festivities. New scores were being added to the silver plates as recently as 1997.

Five years later, with the Tin Cup tradition an annual affair, deeper investigation on the part of *The Gettysburgian* revealed the identity of the once-mysterious author, naming him as Ezra Hespenheidt, and his brother as Jeremiah Hespenheidt. In fact, the article represented quite

---

<sup>2</sup> "Deans Uncover Tin Cup Tradition of Ancient Bullet-Mule Encounters," *The Gettysburgian*, October 14, 1954

<sup>3</sup> *The Spectrum* 1914, p. 174 and *The Spectrum* 1915, p. 213

<sup>4</sup> "Deans Uncover Tin Cup Tradition of Ancient Bullet-Mule Encounters," *The Gettysburgian*, October 14, 1954

<sup>5</sup> "'Tin Cup' Excites G-Burg's Pigskin Clash With Mules", *The Gettysburgian*, October 21, 1954

a bit of research on the part of a weekly college paper; Hesperheidt was said to have married a classmate, Elsa Schmidt, and moved to a farm in Indiana, where he had four children, one of whom was killed during World War II while flying a fighter plane in the Philippines. A grandchild was even said to be applying to Gettysburg College, with her freshmen year set for the fall of 1960. Excitedly, *The Gettysburgian* reported that the *Muhlenberg Weekly* had offered to pay all of Hesperheidt's expenses so that he could be a guest of honor at that year's game. Sadly, Mr. Hesperheidt was an old man in 1959, and "failing health" was said to prevent him from making the trip.<sup>6</sup>

There is, however, another reason that Mr. Hesperheidt could not attend the game. He didn't exist. Ezra Hesperheidt was a fictional character, and the legend of the Old Tin Cup was exactly that: a legend. Although Gettysburg *did* defeat Muhlenberg 3-0 in 1911, and a field goal shortly before half-time provided the difference, the hero of the game was not Jeremiah Hesperheidt. Instead, it was Van Dayhoff.<sup>7</sup> Dayhoff, a sophomore, was from Steelton, Pennsylvania, which is just outside of Harrisburg and nowhere near Allentown.<sup>8</sup> Not only that, Dayhoff left the school the following year, never graduating Gettysburg. He could not possibly have written the mysterious letter discovered by Dean Tilberg.<sup>9</sup> Finally, no people named Ezra Hesperheidt or even Elsa Schmidt ever attended Gettysburg College. No such names appearing in alumni records, student records, yearbooks, or football rosters from the period. In fact, the Tin Cup legend dates not from the 1910's, but from the 1950's, and springs not from a graduate

---

<sup>6</sup> "'Burgian Reveals History of Tin Cup Tradition," *The Gettysburgian*, October 23, 1959

<sup>7</sup> *The Spectrum* 1913, p. 186.

<sup>8</sup> *The Spectrum* 1913, p. 92.

<sup>9</sup> *The Spectrum* 1915, p. 87.

trying to honor his brother and father, but from an editor of *The Gettysburgian* trying to create a lasting tradition for his school.<sup>10</sup>

To understand where the legend springs from, it is necessary to return again to 1954, in those weeks in October leading up to the Homecoming Game against Muhlenberg, when Dean Tilberg discovered his mysterious letter. Gettysburg and Muhlenberg had been annual Homecoming opponents since 1946.<sup>11</sup> The series itself, which had been played without any further interruptions since 1921,<sup>12</sup> was typically competitive. Gettysburg was riding a three-game winning streak in the series as the 1954 game approached.<sup>13</sup> The series, though, was in no way an easy win for the Bullets. The year before, in a game played at Allentown, Gettysburg had prevailed by the slim margin of 20-19, and the game had been in doubt until the very last minutes, when a Gettysburg player intercepted a Muhlenberg pass in the end zone to secure the victory.<sup>14</sup> As a Homecoming series, the game had always been entertaining for fans of both teams.

And there were plenty of those fans, with the crowds growing larger each year. Homecoming was accompanied by a float parade, in which each of the Gettysburg fraternities competed to put together the best float depicting the theme of Gettysburg's victory over its

---

<sup>10</sup> In Charles H. Glatfelter, *A Salutory Influence: Gettysburg College 1832-1982*, Vol. 2 (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: W&M Printing, 1987), p. 954, footnote 261, Glatfelter also lays out the legend of the Old Tin Cup, and argues with reasonable certainty that the story was a fabrication. However, he was either unaware of or did not find important the later addition of the character of Ezra Hesperheidt. Also, although Glatfelter was able to establish that the legend was likely false, his focus was on the much broader topic of the history of Gettysburg College, and thus he conducted no interviews into the subject.

<sup>11</sup> "Alumni Meetings, Grid Contest To Highlight Homecoming Weekend Tomorrow, Saturday", *The Gettysburgian*, November 7<sup>th</sup>, 1946.

<sup>12</sup> *The Spectrum* 1923, p. ?

<sup>13</sup> *The Spectrum* 1952, p. 127.

<sup>14</sup> *The Spectrum* 1954, p. 202.

Homecoming foe.<sup>15</sup> At Gettysburg's 1953 Homecoming game against Lehigh, 5,000 fans, the largest crowd to witness a home Gettysburg football game since World War II, cheered on the Bullets to their homecoming win over the Engineers.<sup>16</sup> Even for other games, crowds of over 2,000 were not considered all that unusual.<sup>17</sup> Football games were accorded with full-page spreads in *The Gettysburgian*, and an editorial exhorting students to attend the games and cheer for their home-town team was typically printed several times during the season. It was easier, of course, to come out to the field and cheer when the team was playing at a high level, and the Bullets clearly were. In 1953, the team had finished the season on an eight-game winning streak, with the only loss of the year coming in the season opener to Delaware.<sup>18</sup> Thus, when the 1954 semester began, there was plenty of excitement about the upcoming season.

It was in this atmosphere that *Gettysburgian* editor-in-chief Bill Martin and sports editor Ted Webster paid a visit to Dean Wilbur Tilberg. The pair hoped to create a tradition that would, in Martin's words, "pep up the morale of the team" and make the annual game with Muhlenberg a focal point of the season. During their visit with the dean, Martin and Webster suggested that the college needed a trophy similar to the traditional ones found in the Big 10, such as the Old Oaken Bucket. They pitched their idea of creating a trophy, and crafted the legend of two brothers and a family heirloom to go along with it. When Dean Tilberg approved the idea, Martin contacted his counterpart, the editor of the *Muhlenberg Weekly*, and the two papers agreed to jointly sponsor the trophy in hopes of creating a new tradition. Evidently, Muhlenberg's Dean Richards was just as willing to participate as Tilberg was, since he too was a

---

<sup>15</sup> *The Spectrum*, 1952, p. 120 and *The Spectrum* 1954, p. 177-178.

<sup>16</sup> "Bullets Demolish Lehigh Saturday Before Huge Homecoming Crowd, 22-7," *The Gettysburgian*, October 22, 1953

<sup>17</sup> "Bullets Trample Red Devils Into Memorial Field's Mud Before Father's Day Crowd", *The Gettysburgian*, November 12, 1953

<sup>18</sup> *The Spectrum* 1954, p. 202

part of the discovery of a tradition that never was. With two weeks remaining before the Homecoming Game, *The Gettysburgian* made the Old Tin Cup front-page news, and worked to drum up some interest in the game.<sup>19</sup> On the second page of that same issue, in fact, *The Gettysburgian* unveiled the words to a new fight song that is apparently the ancestor of the current Gettysburg fight song “Loyalty”; evidently a creation of newspaper’s editorial staff, it contains lyrics similar to the ones sung today at Gettysburg football games.<sup>20</sup>

After the deans agreed to participate in the Tin Cup story, work immediately began on adding Tin Cup ceremonies to a Homecoming that was already filled with pageantry. The annual pep rally and float parade (both through the town on the Friday preceding the game and around the field at halftime) would continue, but would be joined by three new ceremonies that were to become a part of the Tin Cup tradition.<sup>21</sup> The first was a half-time crowning of the “Tin Cup Queen,” elected from a court of Gettysburg’s female students; the winner would fill the same role as the typical Homecoming Queen, but with one addition. The Queen was to take part in the second ceremony, the awarding of a replica tin cup to the most valuable player of the first half; this player would be permitted to keep the imitation cup for himself. This rather unusual award was based off of the Cup legend.

In the mythical game that inspired the trophy, Ezra Hesperheidt was injured just before halftime, and earned the cup on the basis of his play before the break. The modern, annual winners of the trophy were to be no different. Although the wisdom of declaring a most valuable player only halfway through the game may be questioned, it shows that the organizers of the

---

<sup>19</sup> Bill Martin, telephone Interview by author, February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2010. Ted Webster was also interviewed, and while helpful, could not remember about anything about the Cup.

<sup>20</sup> “G-Burg Fight Song”, *The Gettysburgian*, October 14, 1954.

<sup>21</sup> “Highlights Adorn Orange and Blue Weekend Events”, *The Gettysburgian*, October 21, 1954

festivities were committed to creating a connection between the legend of the Old Tin Cup and the festivities that grew out of it. Finally, the post-game awarding of the trophy itself, said to be the original tin cup, was to round out the Homecoming pageantry. Once again, the Tin Cup Queen would do the honors, presenting the trophy to the winning coach and winning captains.<sup>22</sup> 4,000 people packed the stands for the October 24<sup>th</sup> showdown between the two rivals, played on Gettysburg's Memorial Field. The Bullets came into the game with one win and two losses, but managed to thrill the cheering crowd by crushing the Mules, 34-0, equalizing their record. The hero was fullback Bruce Pieper, who scored the first touchdown of the game, which was never really in doubt, and earned the first-ever halftime Tin Cup award.<sup>23</sup> Pieper received the Cup from the first Tin Cup Queen, Bobbie Maurer.<sup>24</sup>

Despite the ceremony, though, the Tin Cup series was slow to get off the ground. The prospect of spending a Saturday afternoon with friends and classmates overshadowed the Cup presentation.<sup>25</sup> Gettysburg's thrilling one-point upset of a favored Delaware team later that season also took place on Memorial Field, and that game, rather than Gettysburg's runaway victory over Muhlenberg, became the defining memory of the 1954 season.<sup>26</sup> In an editorial one year later, *The Gettysburgian* bemoaned the fact that the Tin Cup rivalry had lacked "real pep" the first time around, and encouraged students to "revive it with spirit and life."<sup>27</sup> Bill Martin graduated Gettysburg College in 1955 under the impression that the Tin Cup was going to be a

---

<sup>22</sup> "'Tin Cup' Excites G-Burg's Pigskin Clash With Mules," *The Gettysburgian*, October 21, 1954

<sup>23</sup> "Bullets Machine-Gun Mules 34-0; Battle Maroon Gridders Saturday," *The Gettysburgian*, October 28, 1954

<sup>24</sup> "Bobbie Maurer Rules As Queen of the Tin Cup," *The Gettysburgian*, October 28, 1954

<sup>25</sup> Bill Martin, Telephone Interview by Author, February 13, 2010

<sup>26</sup> "G-Burg Topples Blue Hens," *The Gettysburgian*, November 1, 1954

<sup>27</sup> "Get That Cup!" *The Gettysburgian*, October 20, 1955

one-year phenomenon, and did not hear another word about the trophy that he created until years later. He always assumed that the story had been forgotten.<sup>28</sup>

The Old Tin Cup, however, was not forgotten, and became an annual fixture on the Gettysburg football schedule for nearly a decade to come. In each succeeding year until 1964, the Cup was contested fiercely by both teams. Although Gettysburg dominated the series, winning every game and producing every Tin Cup winner, the series refused to fade. In part, this was because fan support at Gettysburg's Homecoming games was always very good, with loyal supporters not only filling the stands but lining the perimeter of the field to cheer on their team.<sup>29</sup> But the survival of the rivalry was also due to the efforts of the Muhlenberg team. According to Gettysburg halfback Jim Flood, who played football at Gettysburg in three Tin Cup games, playing in three Tin Cup games, Muhlenberg was always an opponent that the Bullets had to take seriously. While the Mules were never the toughest opponents on the Gettysburg schedule (that distinction belonged to Lehigh, Lafayette, and Bucknell), they were always a small, scrappy team that determinedly "stood their ground" and could be relied upon to "fight like tigers."<sup>30</sup> Flood's teammate, offensive guard and defensive tackle Jules Prevost agreed, noting that while Gettysburg "always felt that we had the better team," the Mules were a "pesky" opponent that was never easy to dispatch.<sup>31</sup>

The opinions that Flood, Prevost, and their teammates held about their Allentown-based opponents were borne out by the scores of the annual games. The yearly tussle provided more than one memorable matchup. In the second Tin Cup game, played at Muhlenberg during the

---

<sup>28</sup> Bill Martin, telephone Interview by author, February 13, 2010

<sup>29</sup> Jim Flood, telephone Interview by author, February 13, 2010

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Jules Prevost, telephone Interview by author, February 13, 2010.

1955 season, the Mules led 14-0 with time running out before the half. Sparked by an eighty yard touchdown run by Frank Gagliardi just before the break, the Bullets shocked the Muhlenberg crowd with an incredible fifty-three unanswered points, securing the Cup for another year, 53-14.<sup>32</sup> In 1958, an extra point by Harry Binger was the only difference between the two teams. Thanks to Binger's kick and a blocked extra point, the Gettysburg Homecoming crowd of 5,000 went home happy, able to celebrate their tightly-played 7-6 victory.<sup>33</sup> Two years later, with Gettysburg fighting through a disappointing season (1960 saw the Bullets record their first losing record in nearly a decade), the Bullets provided at least one moment of joy to the hometown fans with what was arguably the most exciting Tin Cup game of all. Trailing 14-6 with just a minute left to play in the game, Muhlenberg drove down the field for a late touchdown, but was forced to attempt a two-point conversion to tie the game. The Mules attempted a pass into the end zone to tie the game, but Gettysburg's defensive back, Rich Bainbridge, managed to swat the ball away. Gettysburg was then able to run out the clock and retain the trophy, while Bainbridge went home the hero of the game.<sup>34</sup>

The distinctive features of the Cup rivalry, and the ceremonies that went along with it, did not begin to fade until the early 1960's. The Tin Cup Queen remained an integral part of the ceremonies (for the 1955 game, played one year before Muhlenberg became a coed school, Gettysburg students elected a Tin Cup Queen, SONDY PYLE, who made the trip to Allentown so that Queen could present the trophy to the most valuable player, even if the Mules could not supply one themselves).<sup>35</sup> Starting with the 1962 game, the winner was referred to by the more

---

<sup>32</sup> *The Spectrum* 1956, p. 27

<sup>33</sup> "G-Burg Nips Muhlenberg For Tin Cup," newspaper clipping found in *1958-1959 Gettysburg Athletic Reports*, Musselman Library Special Collections

<sup>34</sup> *The Spectrum* 1960, p. 57

<sup>35</sup> "Coed Reigns Over "Tin Cup" Game," *The Gettysburgian*, October 20, 1955

generic title of “Homecoming Queen.”<sup>36</sup> Around that time, the legend of the Tin Cup started to fade. The legend had been repeated annually in the first years of the contest, and the 1959 edition added the character of Ezra Hespenheidt to the Tin Cup’s canon, but the space reserved for the legend in the annual game previews provided by *The Gettysburgian* slowly shrank until the sports pages of that newspaper were merely reporting that a Tin Cup trophy was to be contested, omitting its mythical background. Arguably, Homecoming itself was starting to fade in importance; in 1961, the Homecoming Parade was replaced with a fleet of antique cars, and no parades of any kind were mentioned as taking place during 1962 and 1963.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, the most distinctive of the Cup traditions remained in place: the Queen, whether of the Homecoming Game or of the Tin Cup, still presented the trophy to the game’s most valuable player during the halftime ceremonies.

During the early 1960’s, Gettysburg and Muhlenberg started to head in different directions. After three straight losing seasons to start the decade, Gettysburg unveiled what its yearbook proudly described as a “spectacular pro-style offense,” and began to pull away from not only the Mules, but from other traditional opponents.<sup>38</sup> By 1964, it was not unusual for Muhlenberg to come into its games with Gettysburg seeking its first gridiron victory of the season, while the Bullets were busy competing for the Middle Atlantic Conference title and chasing the Lambert Cup.<sup>39</sup> Before the 1964 season began, it was known that Gettysburg, which

---

<sup>36</sup> *The Spectrum* 1963, p. 27

<sup>37</sup> “Muhlenberg Here Saturday For Bullets Home-Coming Football Foe at 1:30 PM,” newspaper clipping found in *Gettysburg College Athletic Reports 1962-1963*

<sup>38</sup> *The Spectrum* 1965, p. 126

<sup>39</sup> A trophy awarded to the best football team in the East that was not considered a major college. Major colleges competed for the Lambert Trophy. Eastern College Athletic Conference, “ECAC Announces Fifth Lambert Meadowlands Football Poll”; available from [http://www.ecacsports.com/lambert/2008-09\\_Releases/lambert\\_111008](http://www.ecacsports.com/lambert/2008-09_Releases/lambert_111008); accessed 22 February, 2010.

had finished 5-3 in 1963<sup>40</sup> would be moving into the University Division, to face off against the highest available level of competition in the conference, while Muhlenberg's team was moving into the College Division, to compete with teams against which it could have more success.

At the time, it was believed that this would be the final game in Gettysburg's rivalry with Muhlenberg, and the Bullets pulled out all the stops for the game, which was not only Homecoming, not only the final home game of the year for a one-loss team competing for the conference title, but also the last game in the history of Gettysburg's Memorial Field, which was to be replaced with a new stadium that winter.<sup>41</sup> The float parade returned, with floats as elaborate as any that had been built during the 1950's. Lambda Chi's float even depicted a rifleman shooting a mule in the head with a rifle; this probably would not be a likely theme for a float today.<sup>42</sup> The Tin Cup legend was presented in full on the front page of *The Gettysburgian* one last time.<sup>43</sup> Ultimately, the game was one long victory celebration for the Bullets. Gettysburg prevailed 51-20 in a rout that saw almost every player on the roster set foot on the field for significant playing time, and almost every starter laid claim to some milestone. In the final halftime presentation of the replica tin cup, Gettysburg's quarterback Jim Ward, who totaled six touchdowns before game's end, received the most valuable player award from the last Tin Cup Queen. At the end of the game, Gettysburg coach Gene Haas and the Bullets' team captains received the Tin Cup one more time.<sup>44</sup> And so the Tin Cup tradition came to an end, seemingly forever. Gettysburg was on to bigger and better things in the University Division, and

---

<sup>40</sup> *The Spectrum* 1964, p. 124

<sup>41</sup> The Bullets did, ultimately, win the conference title in 1964, and very narrowly missed winning the Lambert Cup.

<sup>42</sup> "8 Contend For Homecoming Laurels; Fraternity Floats to Highlight Parade," *The Gettysburgian*, October 23, 1954

<sup>43</sup> "Rivals To Compete In Game Saturday For Traditional Tin Cup Trophy", *The Gettysburgian*, October 23, 1954

<sup>44</sup> "Ward Scores Four TD's In 51-20 G-Burg Victory", *The Gettysburgian*, October 30, 1964

the Tin Cup was moved into a trophy case, where it would sit with dust-gathering plaques honoring dead rivalries and long-ago triumphs.

But the Tin Cup rivalry was not dead. In 1981, Gettysburg left the Middle Atlantic Conference to join the newly-formed Centennial Conference. Among the charter members of the new league were many of Gettysburg's old rivals, Muhlenberg among them. As fate had it, Muhlenberg was scheduled as Gettysburg's homecoming opponent once again. In a further twist of fate, the Cup was rediscovered in what had once been believed to be its final resting place, a trophy case in the Bream Gym. In May of 1981, *The Gettysburgian* reported that during the fall of that year, the Cup would be awarded once more. The article went on to repeat the Tin Cup legend of two opposing brothers and a family heirloom, although whether or not the author, Mary Slagle, realized that the tale was a fabrication is not clear. The article gives no indication that she disbelieved the tale that Bill Martin and Ted Webster had crafted nearly thirty years before.<sup>45</sup> And thus the Old Tin Cup was reborn.

Although the second era of Tin Cup play lasted from 1981 until 1997, about six years longer than the first, it never regained the energy and spirit that had characterized the first period. While Gettysburg's rivalry with Muhlenberg was and remains an annual affair, and while the two teams were, for a time, reciprocal homecoming opponents, the Tin Cup itself was never a major source of motivation for either team. Coach Barry Streeter, Gettysburg's head coach since 1979, explained that Gettysburg's traditional rivals tend to be Franklin & Marshall (Gettysburg's oldest opponent) and Dickinson College, with whom Gettysburg still exchanges an annual trophy. Although the Muhlenberg game is "usually competitive" and gains a big game

---

<sup>45</sup> "Tradition Returns to G-Burg With "Old Tin Cup," *The Gettysburgian*, May 28, 1981. All attempts to get in contact with Mary Slagle, now Mrs. Mary Flinkernagle, failed.

atmosphere when conference championships and winning seasons are at stake, the Tin Cup rivalry never really took hold. The team, he said, was told about the Cup “maybe once.” Neither Coach Streeter nor any of the Gettysburg teams that he coached were aware of the earlier tradition, or the legend that was associated with it.<sup>46</sup>

That is borne out by *The Gettysburgian* of the last thirty years; while the Muhlenberg game is occasionally a focus of attention, the Tin Cup itself is mentioned only twice outside of the first article trumpeting its revival. As Coach Streeter remembers it, the Cup was passed back and forth, without much ceremony accompanying it, for several years, before ultimately dying out when Muhlenberg defeated Gettysburg and did not express any interest in Gettysburg handing over the Cup.<sup>47</sup> This fits with the results of the Gettysburg-Muhlenberg games during the 1990’s. In 1992, Gettysburg defeated Muhlenberg in Allentown, 18-7, dropping a struggling Muhlenberg team to a 1-6 record. Gettysburg, in claiming the victory, regained the Old Tin Cup from the Mules, who had beaten Gettysburg and spoiled the Bullet homecoming the year before.<sup>48</sup> Over the next five years, Gettysburg dominated the rivalry, sometimes even turning the game into a runaway. In 1994, the Bullets scored four touchdowns in the first four minutes to wreck Muhlenberg’s homecoming and claim a 63-14 victory.<sup>49</sup> The 1997 game, which Gettysburg won 44-32,<sup>50</sup> appears to be the final game in which the Tin Cup was exchanged.

Muhlenberg defeated Gettysburg 47-19 the next year, breaking open a game that had been close at halftime with four unanswered touchdowns, but the Old Tin Cup was apparently

---

<sup>46</sup> Barry Streeter, Interview by author, February 19, 2010

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Charles Kidd, “Gettysburg Football Team Gets Back On Track with 18-7 Win”, *The Gettysburgian*, October 29, 1992. This was one of only two occasions during the second era of the Old Tin Cup that *The Gettysburgian* actually mentioned the existence of the trophy.

<sup>49</sup> Michael Karpyn, “Women’s Soccer shocks top-ranked Trenton St., 1-0”, *The Gettysburgian*, October 27, 1994

<sup>50</sup> Peter Huminski, “Bullets slap Mules silly with offensive barrage”, *The Gettysburgian*, October 30, 1997

not exchanged.<sup>51</sup> No game results past 1997 are inscribed on the Cup's base, and the trophy apparently remained at Gettysburg. By the time Muhlenberg regained the Cup in 1998, few people associated with the school would even have remembered the trophy. Muhlenberg's 1998 seniors would have been freshmen in the fall of 1995, while any Muhlenberg players who had been on the team that won the Cup in 1991 (the last time Muhlenberg had previously beaten Gettysburg) would have played their last football game in November of 1994. Perhaps even more importantly, Muhlenberg had hired a new coach, Mike Donnelly with no previous connection to the school after the 1997 season.<sup>52</sup> Since neither the players nor the coach would have been able to remember the Cup, it would have had very little meaning. This would explain the 1997 end to the Tin Cup rivalry.

Ultimately, it is not the truth or the fiction of the legends that are attributed to rivalry trophies that preserve the importance of the game. No story, no matter how dramatic or true, can do that. Competitive games with title implications are important as well, but they cannot sustain a rivalry either. Instead, it is the interest of the participants, the spirit with which they compete, and their importance that they attribute to the game that determines whether or not the rivalry matters. When Bill Martin and Ted Webster concocted their Tin Cup legend in the fall of 1954, they were creating a rivalry and a trophy out of thin air, and yet that trophy became an annual and cherished tradition for eleven years, ceasing not because interest in the rivalry had waned, but because the two teams had ceased playing for scheduling reasons. Furthermore, although the Tin Cup tradition finally died out in 1998, the trophy has not been lost, and Gettysburg still plays

---

<sup>51</sup> Josh Eyler, "Football playing with heart," *The Gettysburgian*, October 29, 1998

<sup>52</sup> Monica Deeb, "Donnelly's Commuting Ends at Muhlenberg: The New Mule Football Coach Won't Be Driving 82 Miles To New York Now," *The Morning Call*, February 4, 1997, found in the Access World News internet database, accessed February 23, 2010

Muhlenberg every year. All it would take is interest, energy, and the spirit of friendly competition on the part of both schools. Such a revival would be perfectly in the spirit of the original Old Tin Cup. And somewhere, it would make Ezra Hesperheidt very proud.

## **Bibliography**

Glatfelter, Charles H. *A Salutary Influence: Gettysburg College, 1832-1985*, Vol. 2.

Mechanicsburg: W&M Printing, 1987

Bill Martin, interviewed by Nicholas Scerbo, February 13, 2010

Jules Prevost, interviewed by Nicholas Scerbo, February 13, 2010

Jim Flood, interviewed by Nicholas Scerbo, February 13, 2010

Barry Streeter, interviewed by Nicholas Scerbo, February 20, 2010

*Gettysburg College Athletic Reports* 1958-1959 and 1962-1963, found in Gettysburg College  
Special Collections, Musselman Library

*The Gettysburgian*, various articles

*The Morning Call*

*The Spectrum* 1913, 1914, 1915, 1923, 1952, 1954, 1956, 1960, 1963