



## High School Sorority Dances

by Mary Alice Klyce Pierman

One of the most enjoyable aspects of being a member of a high school sorority in the 40's was the formal dance held twice each year for most groups. Belle Meade Club was the scene of most of these dances, but I do remember some which were held at downtown hotels like the Maxwell House. The dances in the fall were in honor of the newly-elected pledges, and the ones in the spring focused on the outgoing seniors, as I remember. The SAP's had one thing ding at Christmas each year

Each dance center around a theme, developed in collaboration with the officers of the sorority and one of the local florists. I remember working on one at which the pledges and their escorts were "presented" through a big box of candy. As each girl walked through the box of "Delta Sweets," she and her escort were introduced, and a spotlight followed them the length of the dance floor. Quite a thrill!

The pledges wore white dresses with net, taffeta or satin being the most popular fabrics used. Bertha effects and off-shoulder necklines were flattering, topping full skirts worn over heavily starched petticoats made of domestic material layered with ruffles graduated in width. These could not be bought but had to be made, and the starching was the secret of their giving the dresses a graceful, southern belle look. The starch that was used was at least ten times thicker than regular laundry starch; this made the ironing of them very difficult, to say the least.

Francis Craig's orchestra or Owen Bradley's were popular choices for the "live" music, and each girl had her own special spot on the dance floor where she could be found at every dance. This was her territorial imperative, but I don't know just how everyone knew not to invade another's known territory.

Boys wore tuxedos unless they were either officers in their own fraternities or were escorting an officer of a sorority; then they wore tails. Corsages were sent by the boys, and the florist's bills for the boys asked to escort several girls in the same season were complained about (or bragged about) by the boys' mothers. Tommy Temple was one such favorite.

No-breaks, during which slow, mood music was played, were filled before the dance, sometimes weeks in advance. The stags were not supposed to "break" or "cut in" on the dancing couples during these songs. But during the rest of the dance, boys would tap the left shoulder of the partner of any girl with whom he wanted to dance, and he

would dance with her until the next boy tapped him the shoulder. The more partners a girl had during a dance indicated how much of a "rush" she received. A big rush was a thrill for any girl, of course.

Orchids were sent to show a girls he was special, and a white orchid was reserved for one's real favorite. Camellias, gardenias, carnations, and roses were other favorite choices. They were worn on the right shoulder so as not to be crushed by one's partners, in the hair, pinned at the waist, or tied on the wrist. And officers in the sororities also carried loose arm bouquets of long stemmed roses for the grand march.

Evening wraps were of velvet or of white, red or pastel wool and could be long or short. Ballet slippers were often worn since they didn't show and made tall girls seem shorter and short girls "just right" for short boys.

Long white kid gloves were worn by those fortunate enough to own a pair.

Dances began at 10 p.m. and lasted until 2 a.m. They were often followed by a breakfast at a member's house. Everyone sat around on the floor enjoying a menu of eggs, bacon, sausage, sweet rolls, etc. Sometimes spend-the-night parties for a group of girls followed the breakfasts, and there a re-bashing of the evening's fun took place.

While the most anticipated dances were the ones whose date seemed especially attractive at the moment, it didn't really matter who one actually dated because we enjoyed other people's dates or the stags as much as our own date—or maybe even more so!

A row of chaperones lined the walls in chairs, and we were admonished by our parents to speak to the chaperones and introduce one's date if he or she didn't know them. This usually took place before started dancing.

All of this may not have prepared us for the "real" world, but it was a fun-filled time of our lives when we felt very grown-up. Many of the boys we attended these dances with our senior year in high school entered the service about this time. This brought the war home to us in a very special way. To this day I can remember Francis Craig's playing "Near You" or watching couples jitterbug to Glenn Miller's "String of Pearls" and be glad for these happy times.

## "Speak To The Chaperones"

by Mary Wade Sutton

The senior year in high school was full of "big days" for me. I went to Hillsboro High School, the old building which has burned down and been replaced by the

present Hillsboro High School. One of the most fun things that happened was being elected with Mary Alice Klyce Pierman and Mary Emily Johnson (Taylor) to be in the homecoming court. I had a mental picture of how that would come off. The three of us would arrive on the field in some slick convertible—after a suitable drive around the field where we all waved wildly to our admirers in the stands. Then we would be helped from the car—escorted by gorgeous football players into the center of the field and cheered for loudly. One of us would be crowned queen—we'd all have big bouquets of flowers and would graciously receive our just accolades...or something. We'd look like Jon Whitcomb drawings—sparkly eyes, hair! Indeed, what actually happened was we were told by Gerald Ritter and Tommy Temple that we'd been selected to the Homecoming Court. That was it. They said we'd be told what to do. I don't think they ever told us. But—fantasizing what Queens should do—we discussed our outfits at great length. Long flowering white dresses—net, etc. No—it might have been a rainy, cold night so we decided to be practical—but pretty. Why not all wear white wool dresses—short—and that way our bouquets would show up! Well, Mary Alice had a car at her disposal. One of her brothers, Bill Klyce, was in the service and had left his car with his family "for the duration." If we met at school, then it would take very little gasoline to go to town and find the right dress. Castner Knott's was our final destination. I remember we spent an hour or so going through the racks—looking for that simply elegant short white wool. The longer we looked the more we realized we really would do better to use something we already had—so we settled on wool skirts and sweaters and brown and white saddle shoes. Just as well, too. We went to the game—together—and sat in the stands at the old Central High School field. I remember the place was practically deserted, not a handful of spectators, and not a bit of glamour! The first half ended and our Hillsboro Band marched out on the field to perform. For what seemed like endless minutes we waited for some signal—some motion for us to march out on the field. Finally, three sweaty, dirty football players came out of the locker room and stood at the bottom of the seats and called us. This was it.

We scrambled down and insisted that the boys let us put our left hands on their smelly right arms for the walk to center-field. When we arrived there, Coach Buford Higgs came out from somewhere and said he was proud to present the Homecoming Court from Hillsboro High School. No microphone, no flowers, no crown, no nothing! The boys walked us back to our seats and we looked at each other in amazement!—Not like we had romanticized it for sure—no dates, no Candyland's, no Sweet Shop—but it did look good in the yearbook!

Having been so stung by the "Court" bit, I was a little wary of my next big presentation—which was to be the SAP formal at Christmas time. But the preparation for it was lengthy and careful. It was war-time and while we were too young to be aware of the great tragedy and drama we were affected by shortages of fuel, sugar, stockings, shoes, and

I would say, money. It was unthinkable to be wasteful—but the simplicity of life did not detract from our high spirits. Our parents realized that and helped us to carry out our plans. We had a "crowd"—and did lots of things in groups. We walked, we went to movies, we had "progressive" parties (a course here, there), spend-the-nights. There was always some good father or mother who made enough transportation available that a car load of boys could get to a carload of girls. So, our various Christmas Dances became great projects. The group to which I belonged had simplified its annual formal since 1941. (I remember the year Ella Sykes was president, we went out in the woods and cut cedar trees which we flocked over at Mrs. Gillespie Syke's house and carried across the street to the Belle Meade Club. We made a walkway of flocked cedar trees at one end of the ballroom and called our dance "A Winter Wonderland." Our last dance was called an Artist Ball and we had help—a lot of help. Judy Harvey was in the group. Her father, Mr. Fred Harvey, had come to Nashville and started an amazing department store called Harvey's. He had brought in a display manager and was really revitalizing downtown window displays. We had the nerve to ask him if he would help us decorate our party. Emmie Jackson (McDonald) and I went downtown to his office one November Saturday and he graciously saw us and agreed to help us anyway he could. He sent us to the "display lady" and we told her about our big dance plans! An Artists' Ball caught her imagination and we came up making a great big plywood palette through which each girl would step—and thus be "presented" at the dance. Since flowers were so expensive, we designed amlil pallettes for the officers to carry and Harvey's made them for us, too. The day of the party, all the members of the sorority went out to the Belle Meade Club for a practice for the presentation. It was an amazing night! Harvey's had a crew of five or six men—putting up a great big 35 foot palette with a door in the center. It was placed on a stage at the end of the ballroom towards the Iroquois room. The stage was covered with some sort of tarpoline and there were steps down to the dance floor! Then, a spotlight with vari-colored discs was installed on the little balcony over the dance floor. This party had real professional decorations. We were estatic. I don't think any of us had realize how generous Mr Harvey and his people would be. They seemed to have a grand time. Looking back, I can see it must have been fun for them to create such a stylish party in such a severe period. But, that's getting ahead of the story—it was all the preliminary talking and planning that made the grand night a reality. Multiply my experience by 40 or 50 and you can see what went in to this! First we had to select a date—and I remember it mattered a lot to us that we be at the very last party before we started back to school after Christmas. A great jockeying with other groups—and I suppose we pulled off our desire. We thought—"save the best until last." I'm sure others thought "the first is best"—and so on! Somehow, we were able to reserve the Belle Meade Club with no problem. We didn't have liquor to disrupt an affair—and we were all taught to respect pro-

perty—so we really did not create problems. But, still, it was wonderful of the Club to let the various groups entertain there. So many memories are enveloped in that stately, rambling old clubhouse. After the date was chosen—then each of us had to decide who would take us. We were such good friends that we sort of knew whom each would prefer, but truthfully—in many cases, one girl could just as easily have asked anyone of a number of boys because we all were friends. Then we had to start thinking about our dress! Each of us had a "dressmaker", although occasionally a ready-made dress at Town-Country, Rich Schwartz, Grace's, Tinsley's and some of the other specialty stores, was just right! Mother and I decided since I had very red hair that white would be my best color. We bought the beautiful net and taffeta at Loveman's down on the corner of 5th and Union. I loved the way it smelled—even before it was made! and the rustle of the taffeta. Mrs. Annie Carter, who lived over on Waldkirk Avenue was a gifted seamstress that Jo Durrett (Doubleday) had told us about. So in the late fall, we made an appointment with Mrs. Carter and went over to design the dress. I remember her living room and bedrooms were full of wonderful evening dresses in all hues and colors. She must have sewed for lots of our friends. I have never had a dress I loved so much—not even my wedding dress! It was finished on day before Christmas Eve, and since it was to be my Christmas present, I wanted it hung by the tree. We lived at 110 Kenner Avenue, off of Harding Road. Mrs. Carter lived over close to the Reservoir on Waldkirk. Quite a distance for gas rationing! But, I could not wait to pick up the finished product. Mother and I left after supper that night—very dark, I remember and arrived at Mrs. Carter's in a slight fog. I had my final fitting—and we went down to the car to head home. Two hours later shaken and terrified—we pulled up to 110 Kenner. A fog had come that was so thick that mother and I had driven 5 miles an hour home. I remember we decided to go to Woodmont Blvd. and come over to Harding Road that way. We could not see the intersection of Woodmont and Hillsboro Road. My daddy was furious—and frightened! Couldn't that dress have waited! Well, it didn't but that's how important it was at the time.

I wish I could say I remember the dance like it was yesterday, but I don't! I know that after the practice I went to the Duchess Beauty Salon which was off of White Bridge Road at Harding Road. Mrs. Lemon washed and set my hair. Mae Caldwell was there, too. When I got home, some flowers had come from my aunts and uncles, the Willoughby Rhodes and the Joseph Martins. We had resolved not to let our date send flowers, since we being so formal—so it was fun to open up the Tom Harrison's box and find two fragrant gardenias. Someone had a dinner party for us—and my date, Maclin Davis, Jr. and I went at about 6:00 o'clock. No doubt it was a great relief to all the families to have us out and on our way. But, what went on behind the scenes must have been frantic. Somehow, as we arrived at the club around 8 o'clock in our "old" evening dresses—we found upstairs at the Belle Meade Club—our "new" evening dresses. No one had dared eat dinner in their grand