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### 1890s: 19th Century Trolling

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Hindsight is 20/19  
1890s: An Instrument ... of Chaos

ALLISON GELMAN: Welcome back to Hindsight is 20/19, in which we look at 250 years of Dartmouth's history through 25 objects from the library's archives by examining one per decade. My name is Allison Gelman. I'm a Dartmouth '18 and I'll be your host for this episode.

Senior year I worked at Rauner Library as a student assistant. So, when I was not in class, I spent a lot of time looking at some pretty cool old stuff. For both my history classes and my work at Rauner, I spent a lot of the time researching student life at Dartmouth. One interesting bit of student culture involved the object that Timothy is going to look at for the first time.

T: Hello, I'm Timothy. I'm the class of '21.

A: Can you tell me what you think this artifact is and maybe what it's made of?

T: Oh, yes. At first I think it's kind of like a flute because there is like um a smaller hole on like the other end, while there a bigger one – um wait! That would make it more of a trumpet. Um instead of flute. So, like I think it's like kind of musical instrument. But, then again, if this is a musical instrument, there isn't really any buttons that like one could play with. Um what is it make of? I think it's make of just like some kind of metals. Probably copper or just iron.

A: Do you want to tap it?

T: Like metal. Yeah, sure.

A: Nice.

T: It sounds like... it sounds like, yeah just metal. I don't know which kind of metal it would be, but it seems real interesting. Wait, wait, wait. If I look closer... I... wow! There is like so many signatures on there. There's like names all over. Wow.

A: So I'm going to step back a little bit and why don't you blow into it then.

T: Okay. That's a good – good idea 'cause... yeah. Alright, here we go. Freak. Wow! That was loud! So it is kind of like an instrument thing! It's okay that's not an instrument it's a trumpet, it's a surprise party instrument. You know, like when you're having a birthday party for like a birthday for someone, um birthday boy or girl, just blow this like while they're coming in and like "Surprise!" This, this could be it, right? Like, this could be like um to signal a little surprise and like just make it loud and everything. Wow! Okay. So, I was partly correct that like you can actually blow into this thing.

A: If I were to tell you that this was a part of Dartmouth's history like it's a Dartmouth artifact, what do you think this possibly could be?

T: I think it could be some kind of artifact for a class in which maybe, 'kay maybe not a whole class, but maybe like a frat or something um had like this equipment in which like of the artifact in which people just like write their names on it 'cause I know there is a lot of name scribble all

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over it - on the metal. Um so maybe like just putting memory, like a memorial thing, put the memories down saying oh that like saying that “Oh, we’re all a part of this organization, this frat.”

A: And you were correct, it’s like a horn you–

T: That’s a horn!

A: That you blow into.

T: That’s the word I was trying to get to.

A: Yeah. Why would Dartmouth students be using a horn?

T: See, that’s a good question! Why would Dartmouth students use a horn... for the Green Key? No, for hazing? No, freshman hazing? No, to surprise people? Wait, hazing! So like, when people, wait like – when the freshman like um sophomores that are getting into the frat they went into dorms and like wake them up and attract them to the hazing processes and this could be something they wake them up with.

A: What like questions might this artifact bring up for you as you are looking at it?

T: First of all, like – why are people scribbling their names and their signatures all over it and what is it used for? Yeah and like why does it look like this? Um did they blow into this? I mean if they did use it as a musical instrument, I mean, did they use it as a horn to like wake people to like party or anything or did they use it with other like purposes? Yeah, like, if this was used for hazing, why do they use it? What – how do they use it?

A: Timothy your observations are pretty on point. Today we are talking about a tin horn. Horns like this were used by students at Dartmouth for over a century. The students would sound these horns as a way to cause trouble on campus, so they were used for pranks, hazing, and sometimes for generally creating chaos.

We know that tin horns have been a part of Dartmouth tradition since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. At this time, authorized horns were used to dismiss classes because they didn’t have a bell. But, sometimes a horn was sounded without authorization. There is a record from 1775 of a student blowing a horn before the scheduled dismissal time to get everyone out of class early. Not unlike the prank of pulling a fire alarm today. This prank at the college was pretty risky because the student who sounded the horn early was punished with a fine of what is today about \$400.

In later decades, as Timothy guessed, the tin horns were used as a form of hazing. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, students used their horns to tease each other, and this tradition became cleverly known as “horning.” One letter written by a freshman in 1872 described how some sophomores came in and “horned” them one night. What he means is that the sophomores stood outside the freshman dorms and sounded their horns while the freshmen were trying to sleep or study. In 1868, some boys walked their fellow classmate to his train and as a sort-of goodbye, they decided to horn all

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around the neighborhood. Students also sounded their horns when they saw a boy crossing campus with a girl. Which I guess was a somewhat unusual site when the campus was all male. So, for students, the horns became a way to tease each other—a less extreme version of hazing.

But, unlike most hazing as we know it today, the horn was used to haze professors. An article in the Dartmouth newspaper from 1893 mentions that it was “customary when a body of students did not like the action of a member of the faculty, to say nothing to him about it, but to appear at his house a night or two after, with instruments of music and serenade him.” So, serenading I guess pretty much meant that when a professor gave too much homework, they would go to his house and blare their horns at him. The administration tried to end this tradition. Before they had that hefty fine for the practical joke of getting people out of class early, soon they turned to suspension, and eventually used expulsion as a punishment for “horning.”

So like most hazing, you had to do certain things to not get caught. Successful horning depended on anonymity and safety in numbers. So in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, students always went in groups to tease the freshmen and when hazing professors, they sometimes even wore masks.

Because of the anonymity and safety-in-numbers, horning could simply create chaos. They were just one in the crowd and the reason it would always turn into chaos is because horning didn't actually lead into any real changes. Classes did not get shorter. Professors never changed their minds. And the workload did not get easier.

Even in 1851, horns were used as an instrument for just making mayhem. A bunch of students went to an event in St. Johnsbury, Vermont and supposedly sounded their horns for hours. It was so loud that the Congressman who was brought in to speak couldn't give his oration over the noise. The horning free-for-all led to a bunch of the students being suspended.

In 1896, an event that was termed the “Horning Bee” was the demise of the tradition and it's the reason we are talking about horning in the 1890's podcast episode.

This “Horning Bee” began because the stingy Professor H.D. Foster. He was a Dartmouth alum who came back to teach history and he gave way too much work. His classes required, and I quote, an “immense amount of notetaking, too outside research, as well as constant due dates.” In 1896, I guess the sophomores in his class could not take it anymore because they showed up at his house one night with horns blasting. Soon, students from the other classes as well as outsiders came to watch and even began to participate. With so many people in the dark of the night and masks to hide their faces, essentially a mob erupted. Snow balls, snow-covered rocks, and supposedly even coal was thrown at the professor's home. They horned and horned and broke the windows of the Professor's home well into midnight.

The next week was quiet because the President of the College, President Tucker, was out of town. The sophomore class met and they decided to just take the blame as a class—they were pretty much relying on safety in numbers, they thought Tucker couldn't expel them all. President Tucker thought otherwise. He came back early from his trip and he refused to make it a class affair. Instead, he started an investigation. It was only a matter of time before some students were to be blamed and punished. The dependence on anonymity and safety in numbers was gone.

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Eight sophomore men stepped forward and confessed that they had been involved. As punishment, they were separated from the college. Separation means that they had to leave at the end of the year and reapply to get back in. So basically they were expelled.

Partly due to their athletic achievements, these eight men who confessed were considered the “backbone” of the sophomore class. So the students, parents, and some Dartmouth alum appealed to President Tucker on behalf of these eight men to reconsider the case. They argued why would only the men who confessed be expelled while other guilty students who decided to lie not get punished? A committee of students even encouraged more students to confess, almost in protest of the expulsion decision they were like asking Tucker to expel them too.

Eventually Tucker reconsidered the case and he even considered deliberation. In a mass meeting of students, they unanimously adopted resolutions to abandon the custom of horning. So Tucker trusted that with this resolution passed by the students, the tradition was over. Horning was done, and so he reinstated the eight students who were expelled.

The tin horn Timothy and I looked at today was given to Rauner Library by one of the eight men expelled, James Lyman Belknap. The story of Belknap and the 7 other sophomores is reflective of what Timothy first observed about the artifact of today’s episode. He immediately noticed that it was some sort of instrument and from the story, we learned it was an instrument, in that students blew into the horn to make a loud obnoxious noise at their professor who gave too much work. We also learned it was an instrument of hazing and even chaos at the college.

But as goes with many of the artifacts in the collection, it is hard to know everything about one artifact’s history. Timothy asked about the names and words etched into the horn’s sides. Unfortunately, I don’t know the exact answer. We do know that other horns do not have these etchings. In fact, they might not have any names carved in. We also know that although Belknap was the class of 1898, it’s the number 1900 that is the largest etching. So, as the college archivist Peter Carini hypothesized, it’s possible that the horn was used for an event after he graduated and maybe it’s at that event that attendants decided to sign the horn, the famous horn that caused such a stir at the college. Maybe it was a wedding held on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1900 at Squam Island, the date and place that are carved in. Maybe there, the horn was repurposed from an instrument of hazing and chaos into one of celebration.

The horn, the artifact of today’s episode, exemplifies a lot of what I’ve learned in my research at Rauner Library. Sometimes things in the archives leave us guessing and sometimes they give us huge insights into student life and their beloved yet sometimes lawless traditions.

Hindsight 20/19 is a production of Dartmouth College Library and is produced as a part of the celebration of Dartmouth’s 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, highlighting selected objects from Rauner’s Special Collections Library. This episode was written and directed by Allison Gelman and produced by Peter Carini. Our sound engineer was Laura Barrett. Thank you for listening and we hope you will continue to enjoy Hindsight is 20/19.