

**'FOOLS ABROAD':****The Town-Gown Relationship Between Massey University  
Students and Palmerston North at Capping Time  
1963-1973**

**A research essay presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honours in History at Massey University.**

MASSEY UNIVERSITY



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Photograph front cover: ‘Lord and Lady Massey’ retire to the duck pond in the Square, after addressing the Mayoral party and onlookers at Procesh, 1969.

© *Manawatu Evening Standard*, 17 April 1969

## INTRODUCTION:

In May of 2003, a letter appeared in the *Manawatu Evening Standard* as part of an ongoing debate in Palmerston North about changes to the city's central green space, The Square. The correspondent questioned the City Council's intention to 'revamp' The Square in order to attract more visitors to the city:

The idea is that if we brush up the "image" of the city, then people will flock here and life will become more "vibrant". Well, the city fathers seem to have forgotten that Massey University causes heaps of people to come here who certainly otherwise wouldn't, and if they haven't made the place more vibrant over the last 30 years, then it isn't ever going to happen.

The only time it used to happen was when the students cavorted through the centre with their annual capping parade, and the dour councillors cancelled that ages ago (in fact, the cancelling came about after a city councillor was hit in the kisser by a lump of horse manure flung from one of the floats.)

...Recently, on the same day, police moved swiftly to disperse a group of young people who had gathered in The Square – but looked on benignly when another group of young people ran amok, causing fires in Ada Street several times during the evening.<sup>1</sup> The difference was, that one group was from one social class and race, and the other from another.

Social problems and "crime" are so often the result of the perceptions of those in authority who decide what can be tolerated and what can't... <sup>2</sup>

There are three elements in this letter that are of particular interest to this study of 'cavorting students' and 'dour councillors': the impact of Massey University students upon the city in general; the specific impact of student-generated capping activities upon the city's residents<sup>3</sup>; and the varying flexibility of official tolerance in relation to student activities, as opposed to those of the rest of the city's population – the license granted them to behave in particular ways, at particular times.

This study examines the town-gown relationship between Massey University students and Palmerston North residents at capping time, from 1963-73, with particular reference to capping stunts and student processions (Procesh). Other strong facets of student-generated capping activity included a Revue, Graduation Ball and the publication of *Masskerade*, the annual capping magazine. While each of these provides interesting insights into how students celebrated capping, this research exercise concentrates on public manifestations of capping as an indicator of the 'town-gown' dynamic.

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<sup>1</sup> Ada Street is part of an established student flatting neighbourhood in the inner city.

<sup>2</sup> *Manawatu Evening Standard*, 7 May 2003 - letter to the editor from Craig Harrison

<sup>3</sup> 'Capping' is the name given to events designed to mark university graduations in New Zealand, whether formal ceremonies, or informal celebrations.

(*Masskerade*, with its rich and controversial history, is a subject in itself, and while it would no doubt have enriched this work it could not be dealt with in sufficient detail within the confines of the word limit.)

Place and time are both important factors in this relationship. From its beginnings as Massey Agricultural College<sup>4</sup>, Massey University College (as it became in 1963)<sup>5</sup> underwent major developmental change throughout the next decade, with expansion in the range of subjects taught, the number and nature of students attending courses on campus and the buildings in which to accommodate them. All of these areas of expansion affected the town-gown relationship: just as Massey had to adapt to changes in its ethos and operation, so the city had to adapt, economically and socially. Whereas an agricultural college could have minimal social impact on the conservative ethos of a provincial centre servicing the surrounding rural community, Massey's expansion into full university mode, including science and liberal arts subjects, brought new types of staff and students to the university and community. As Palmerston North was the smallest urban university centre in New Zealand throughout this period, the relative size of the university-based population of the city was greater than that of other university centres around New Zealand, and the visibility and impact of its students was thus, arguably, intensified. Civic authorities and local business people were quick to appreciate the economic benefits of a larger university-based population, yet its social benefits were less obvious to many of Palmerston North's citizens.<sup>6</sup> Planning documents published by the Palmerston North City Council (PNCC)<sup>7</sup> show an official awareness of the need to incorporate increasing numbers of students into the city's accommodation networks, yet restrict their planning to infrastructural needs – these documents do not mention

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<sup>4</sup> Massey Agricultural College was established in 1928, and retained its agricultural emphasis until the early 1960s.

<sup>5</sup> The 'college' name evolved into Massey University of Manawatu in 1964, and finally to Massey University in 1966.

<sup>6</sup> Many of the students on Massey's internal roll came from other regions, increasing the population of both city and university. This influx brought people, and money. Adrian Gover's thesis, *Massey University and Palmerston North: An Impact Study Of Some Relationships Between University and City* (M.A. thesis, Massey University, 1978) investigates a decade of university growth from 1966-1976. He concluded (p. 123) that for every one hundred internal students enrolled at Massey in the decade, 35 staff members and dependents, 18 houses and 19 university jobs resulted, with 6 additional jobs in supporting industries, and a total of \$377,075 was added to the city's income.

<sup>7</sup> May also be referred to from this point on as the Council or City Council.

students' social impact on the city, and so do not include this in their priorities or planning.<sup>8</sup>

If the importance of these students in this city is recognized as significant in capping activities and reactions to them, then the concurrent factor of the time period in which these events occurred should also be considered.<sup>29</sup> The growth of Massey University throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, and subsequent influx of students to Palmerston North, coincided with the limited but visible development of a youth 'counter-culture' from the late 1960s that challenged accepted and acceptable modes of dress and behaviour. Perceptions of youth rebellion, whether or not the youth involved felt themselves to be particularly rebellious, contributed to perceptions of difference between Massey students and the rest of the Palmerston North population. This sense of difference was intensified at capping time, as students were given, or claimed, license to behave in particularly anarchic and sometimes 'anti-social' ways. The disruption caused at this time was accepted with varying degrees of good humour, tolerance and exasperation by the City Council and civic authorities, and by the city's residents. The central focus of this study then, is the 'ebb-and-flow' nature of the town-gown relationship at capping time: what - or who - was responsible for changes in attitude towards Procesh and capping stunts, and why did it change over time?

### **Sources:**

Primary sources used to investigate this question include the use of material from Massey University Archives and Palmerston North City Archives, providing both student and City Council perspectives, and their assumptions about each other; student and city newspapers, including articles on the planning and execution of student capping events, editorial comment and letters to the editor; and excerpts from interviews with students or observers. It is hoped that these sources will portray some sense of the motivation behind, and colour within, the annual capping exuberance that entertained and disrupted Palmerston North every year during this period. Physical displays of student imagination and identity evident in Procesh and capping stunts provide a strong base for investigating

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<sup>8</sup> The planning documents briefly referred to will be discussed in Chapter Two.

the town-gown relationship, but also for adding to the histories of students' experience of tertiary education in New Zealand, and of New Zealand youth culture in this period.

While there is a body of work relating to New Zealand universities in general, little of it is student-focused and, of that, very little relates to a social or cultural historiography of student life. The emphasis tends to be on students as consumers of services offered, resulting in poor coverage of the extra-academic influences of students upon their communities.<sup>9</sup> This is also a feature of the existing secondary sources relating to Massey University's impact upon Palmerston North, as infrastructural planning took precedence over investigations of the social or cultural impact of Massey's students.<sup>10</sup> These omissions – whether consciously made or not – limit their value as source material for this exercise, other than as a point of questioning: were the social activities (or proclivities) of students the price that the community expected to pay for the economic benefits they undoubtedly brought? The four earliest established New Zealand universities – Auckland, Victoria (Wellington), Canterbury (Christchurch) and Otago (Dunedin) – have, through the efforts of their Student Associations, published histories that provide a good sense of changing student lifestyles and attitudes but, while these volumes will be useful as comparative background sources to this study, they cannot offer specific insights into the Palmerston North experience.<sup>11</sup> There are two existing historical studies on facets of student life at Massey Agricultural College. Tom Brooking's book, *Massey: Its Early Years*, covers the period from the College's opening in 1928 to 1943. It provides a well-rounded summary of the college in general, and a vigorous impression of student life, over

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<sup>9</sup> Much of the work about universities is generated within universities, for example theses, departmental reports, planning papers or University Grants Committee documents. Jubilee histories of New Zealand universities, or aspects of them, provide an historical overview of teaching, personnel and development of the institutions. These are noted in Chapter 1 (Student Culture)

<sup>10</sup> A range of Palmerston North City Council Planning Department studies focus on infrastructural issues: *University and City: An Introductory Assessment of the Impact of Massey University Upon Palmerston North*, compiled by B. D. Bang and J. C. B. Mercer, August 1970; *Population of Palmerston North 1872-2000* (revised Edition incorporating 1971 Census Results, no compiler noted), October 1971; *Impact of Tertiary Students on Palmerston North City*, prepared by Malcolm Thomas, January 1992; *Viewpoints*, Volume II: Raw Results, compiled by Bruce Ramsay, February 1973

<sup>11</sup> Sam Elworthy, *Ritual Song of Defiance. A Social History of Students at The University of Otago*, Dunedin: Otago University Students' Association, 1990; Stephen Hamilton, *A Radical Tradition. A History of the Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association 1899-1999*, Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association, 2002; Fay Hercock, *A Democratic Minority. A Centennial History of the Auckland University Students' Association*, Auckland University Press, 1994; Jean Sharfe, *Players, Protestors and Politicians: A History of the University Of Canterbury Students' Association*, Christchurch: Clerestory Press, 1995

this period. Traditions consciously generated by early Massey undergraduates at capping time remained a feature of capping throughout the 1963-1973 period, and are useful as a comparative tool in this exercise. In addition, Lesley Courtney's honours research exercise on women students at Massey from 1932-1963 adds to the student-focused literature of students at Massey, and examines the experience of women as a minority on campus. As valuable as these sources are to a wider sense of what it meant, or means, to be a Massey student, neither of them investigates the period after Massey became a full university. There is, as yet, no Massey University Students' Association history: this study may help to fill a gap in our understanding of New Zealand university students, and also add to our understanding of Palmerston North as a university city and community.

Other source material has come from theses which investigate aspects of youth culture in the broader New Zealand context: Moira Smith's work on capping at Victoria University and the ritual aspects of capping as public ceremony provides a theoretical basis for examining the community's conditional granting of license to students for this period.<sup>12</sup> Aspects of ritual and festival studies that can be related to capping events include Mikhail Bakhtin's oppositional model of festivals, where revellers challenged the usually dominant official culture, often in deliberately vulgar ways.<sup>13</sup> Barbara Babcock and Alessandro Falassi have both studied elements of 'symbolic inversion', where everyday patterns of behaviour are reversed during festivals, and Max Gluckman's conceptual use of 'licence' provides the mechanism by which this can occur.<sup>14</sup> Donna Soo's investigation of youth culture in New Zealand in the 'Aquarian Age'<sup>15</sup>, provides context for the counter-cultural self-expression that some students embraced, and some city residents feared. Three theses by Geography post-graduate students, on aspects of

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<sup>12</sup> Moira Smith, 'The Ritual Humour of Students: Capping at Victoria University, 1902-1998', PhD thesis, Indiana University, 1992

<sup>13</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, (translation by Helene Iswolsky), Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984

<sup>14</sup> Barbara Babcock, 'Introduction', in *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society*, Barbara Babcock (ed), Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978; Alessandro Falassi, 'Festival: Definition and Morphology', in *Time Out of Time: Essays on the Festival*, Alessandro Falassi (ed), Albuquerque: New Mexico Press, 1987; Max Gluckman, *Custom and Conflict in Africa*, Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1955

<sup>15</sup> Donna Soo, *Protest, 'Conformity and Culture: New Zealand Youth in the Aquarian Age 1960- 1975'*, MA thesis, Victoria University, 1999



Palmerston North's demography and university-city links, provide background information for other facets of the town-gown experience.<sup>16</sup>

### **Chapter Development:**

Each of the four following chapters will investigate an aspect of the central question, of what accounted for changing attitudes towards student generated capping events in the 1963-1973 period. Chapter One, 'Ceremonies and Rituals in Context', will discuss theoretical models of rituals and ceremonies, which are then related to student activities and to capping ceremonies in particular, such as the conditional use of 'licence', allowing students to behave in otherwise societally unacceptable ways at certain times. The application of the New Zealand model of graduation and student expressions of capping to the theories discussed will provide a general context, while identifying that which is specific to Massey and to Palmerston North will provide a basis for further chapters.

In Chapter Two, 'Town and Gown – Palmerston North and Massey', the brief outline of this interaction given in the introduction will be expanded to show Massey's growing influence and significance to the city, in terms of economy, population ratios and attitudes. The history of student interaction with city officials and residents will show change over time, as the increasing visibility of students (in terms of their numbers and modes of self-expression) provokes stronger reactions from residents. Perceptions of city residents about students, and of students about residents, are an important indicator of their willingness to accommodate each other throughout the academic year, and particularly at capping time, when extremes of action and reaction are likely.

Chapter Three, 'Procesh', examines what happened when the students hit the streets. Procesh was highly visible, as only a bunch of loud and raucous students could be when parading through a provincial city centre, and the subject matter of floats entered in the parade showed students' awareness of their ability to provoke as well as entertain. This

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<sup>16</sup>V. R. C. Warren, 'Geography and Planning in Palmerston North', MA thesis, Massey University, 1969; Adrian Gover, 'Massey University and Palmerston North: An Impact Study Of Some Relationships Between University and City', M.A. thesis, Massey University, 1978; J. E. Hogan, 'Student Accommodation in Perspective', M.A. thesis, Massey University, 1980

provides a strong lens for testing an 'ebb-and-flow' model of town-gown relations. Interactions between MUSA officials and students, and between MUSA and the PNCC offer two views of this – another is shown in the variety of attitudes expressed in the press, by editorial staff and the public. The Community Chest fundraising dispute between MUSA and the PNCC, which continued throughout the decade, will show attitudinal shifts in tolerance and understanding between the two organisations over a mutually beneficial aspect of capping.

Chapter Four, 'Capping Stunts' details the nature of stunts undertaken throughout the decade. In the early part of the period stunts tended to be student-oriented, where the primary emphasis was on entertainment or publicity for other capping events, with minimal public involvement. Later stunts showed a change in orientation, with an element of deception apparent, and public participation actively sought (although not necessarily consciously given) as the targets of inconvenience or even humiliation. Other significant elements of stunts - their varying degrees of legality, whether MUSA sanctioned them or not, and residents' judgements of their cleverness or inanity – will also be discussed.

The conclusion will summarize the economic and social elements at work in the relationship between students and city residents at capping time. Changes in attitudes and values of both groups over the decade, and the consequences for student-generated capping events, provide a basis for evaluating the apparent decline in interest towards Procesh and stunts at Massey, as at other New Zealand universities.

Growing up in Palmerston North in the 1960s and 1970s, I became increasingly aware of university students as a breed apart and, like many other Palmerstonians, watched with amusement, bemusement and a little envy as they flouted the city's tacit codes of acceptable behaviour during capping week. It seemed unthinkable that I would become one of them. My sisters and I were part of the first generation on either side of our family to attend university – it was the same for many New Zealand 'baby-boomers'. As more New Zealanders have access to tertiary education being a university student has since lost

much of its mystique, although many of the town-gown issues of economic and social interdependence remain.

## CHAPTER ONE: RITUAL, FESTIVAL AND STUDENT CULTURE

[Carnivals were] sharply distinct from the serious official, ecclesiastical, feudal, and political cult forms and ceremonials. They offered a completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations; they built a second world and a second life outside officialdom.<sup>17</sup>

Capping presents two faces to the public: serious university-controlled graduation ceremonies with academic regalia and presentation of scrolls, and light-hearted student-generated celebrations. They are similar in that both involve elements of self-conscious ritual, where traditions have been invented and upheld because they represent something about university life that the participants' value and that others recognise, as in this local newspaper editorial:<sup>18</sup>

Next week will be an important one for many students and former students of the Massey University College of the Manawatu as it is the capping week. But for those who have not yet reached the stage of graduating it is a week of traditional gaiety. Capping week festivities is an internationally recognised tradition, and in the past the local students have made every endeavour to uphold this.<sup>19</sup>

Yet in most other respects they are, at best, complementary, and more usually opposing, facets of the same event. Once the initial dichotomy is noticed, others become apparent: establishment paired with youth culture; serious with playful; formal with informal; order with disorder. It is tempting to continue in this way when placing the two types of events into a wider academic context: does the formality of Graduation constitute a ritual, and the spontaneity of Procesh a festival?

The formal style of University graduation in New Zealand has consciously followed that of British universities. Transplanting an established tradition was a means of adding weight to the perceived value of a university education, and was in keeping with the adoption of many other aspects of British cultural values at the time of the development of the first New Zealand institutions.<sup>20</sup> Graduation ceremonies consisted of a procession of

<sup>17</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, (translation by Helene Iswolsky), Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984, pp.5-6

<sup>18</sup> The term 'invented tradition' is used by Eric Hobsbawm in the introduction to *The Invention of Tradition*, Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983. He defines it as 'taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.'p.1

<sup>19</sup> *MES*, 27 March 1963

<sup>20</sup> Establishment dates for Auckland, Victoria, Canterbury and Otago universities were 1883, 1899, 1873 and 1869 respectively.

academic staff in full regalia and the public conferment of degrees on robed graduands, accompanied by traditional university music such as *Gaudeamus Igitur*. The intended solemnity and dignity of these occasions was, however, from early in each university's history, interrupted with loud and organised interjections from the assembled undergraduates, who rustled newspapers in unison, heckled university office holders and found new ways of disrupting proceedings. Tom Brooking, in his history of Massey's early years, writes of 1930s graduation ceremonies where student 'pranks' included 'synchronised alarm clocks ringing at three minute intervals under the chairs of staff and guests on stage; the release of frightened and blinkered hens from the gallery on the same occasion; and the liberation of a pig when C.P. McMeekan and Mac Cooper received their degrees.'<sup>21</sup> It is interesting to observe elements of ritual and festival combined in one ceremony, although Brooking notes that the small numbers of students at Massey at this time allowed for some leeway that would not be permissible later. It seems that university staff recognised, and validated, student behaviour at such times, showing an implicit understanding of both sides of the event.

### **Ritual and Festival**

A considerable body of literature has been written about the nature and definition of ritual and festival, and their relationship to the cultures of which they are a part. A brief summary of some relevant elements of these cross-disciplinary studies is useful, to help situate student capping events into a theoretical framework. Of particular interest is the concept of 'inversion', whereby it is agreed that the values and norms of everyday behaviour can be inverted for specific groups at specific times. What are the 'rules' governing such extraordinary behaviour? Is involvement an indicator of subversion of the dominant culture by the festival participants, or is the granting of licence to temporarily transgress a safety valve for that culture whereby its values are being upheld even while being mocked? Is the festival intended primarily for the entertainment of its participants, or for the wider community? Asking these questions of the existing literature on the

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<sup>21</sup> Brooking, p.120. Until 1938, graduation ceremonies were held in the main College Hall at Massey. Increasing numbers of graduates led to the ceremony being transferred to the Palmerston North Opera House, which was used throughout the period of this study.

festival may allow an evaluation of common features of festivals in order to assess student festivals in general, and any unique features of the particular experience of student capping events.

Much of the literature in this area stems from anthropological studies of festival and ritual.<sup>22</sup> While the range of events and activities encompassed by these terms make a single definition difficult, some common features of festivals become apparent. They include Robert J. Smith's definition of 'periodic moments of special significance to a community that are set aside for celebration'<sup>23</sup>, and Frank Manning's concept of 'celebrations' as 'large scale events that involve performance, entertainment, and are public and participatory'<sup>24</sup>.

A renewed interest in festival study in the 1970s by academic folklorists focused on festival as separate from ritual. Smith notes that, in western culture 'while rituals are associated with the solemn, serious, and important side of life, festivals [have] been consigned to the realm of the playful, trivial and immoral'<sup>25</sup>. She marks the contribution of three scholars – Josef Pieper, Harvey Cox and Mikhail Bakhtin – in restoring carnival, play and fantasy as academic topics worthy of serious study. Of these, Bakhtin's work on Carnival most celebrates the vulgar or grotesque aspects of popular culture that had been sanitized both from festivities and accounts of festivity influenced by a 'modern bourgeois aesthetic'.<sup>26</sup> Bakhtin also emphasized the oppositional nature of carnivals, asserting that the characterizing features of folk culture and the carnivalesque – humour and parody, playing with ideas of grossness or vulgarity, deliberate inversion of established patterns or structures, change over stability, all displayed publicly – are diametrically opposed to official culture.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Some writers, such as Victor Turner and Max Gluckman have distinguished between the two terms, considering that ritual implies a spiritual or religious dimension, while others (La Fontaine and Leach) have noted the wide range of diverse events encompassed by the concept 'ritual', and the lack of agreement over its precise meaning. Smith, p.30-31

<sup>23</sup> Robert J. Smith, quoted in Smith, p.34

<sup>24</sup> Frank Manning, quoted in Smith, p.35

<sup>25</sup> Smith, p.37

<sup>26</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, in *Rabelais and his World* considers the importance of the tradition of 'popular humour' to an understanding of Rabelais.

<sup>27</sup> Smith, pp.41-42

While Bakhtin considered the carnivalesque as a challenge to official culture, other scholars saw disorder of this kind as a regulating mechanism that worked by allowing an outlet for dissent and, in so doing, reinforced the values and order of the culture.<sup>28</sup> Further anthropological studies considered the human predilection for making order, and for consciously - and publicly - playing with disorder, in what Babcock called 'symbolic inversion or ritual reversal'.<sup>29</sup> It is what these public displays of symbolic inversion indicate about both the participants and their audience that continues to interest scholars. They become keys to culture, although clearly not the only key. Displays provide a discrete point of focus for examining values and attitudes of both groups: how each group views the performance (given their heightened awareness of it), how they see their own role in it, and whether they relate this to their culture.

### **Student Culture**

Although college authorities have attempted to mould undergraduate worlds, they have succeeded only in setting the outer parameters of permissible behaviour. College faculty has seen itself as determining students' lives through the courses that it teaches and through the power of personal influence. But professorial words and gestures have been filtered through the evolving cultures of students' own devising.<sup>30</sup>

This theoretical framework on festivals and their participants can be applied to studying students' capping events and, specifically, the Massey University experience. Capping provides an established time frame, a departure from the 'ordinary' into 'extraordinary', a public awareness of its form and likely content, and the potential for temporary inversion of established societal norms. Yet despite its lively history it has not been widely studied as an aspect of student culture, and Moira Smith's study of the ritual humour of capping (at Victoria University) provides a valuable addition to the literature. Most studies of New Zealand university students have, instead, tended to concentrate on their status as consumers of university services, and have generally been conducted by educators or university bureaucrats for the purpose of creating a better fit between their role and that of students. (Histories of New Zealand universities and the relatively recent collection of New Zealand university Students' Association histories are a welcome departure from

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<sup>28</sup> Victor Turner and Max Gluckman both focused on anthropological studies of disorder as a necessary balance to strictures of organized society.

<sup>29</sup> Babcock (1978), cited in Smith, p.44

<sup>30</sup> Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Campus Life: Undergraduate Cultures from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, New York: A. A. Knopf, 1987, p.4

this, as they are written primarily as institutional or social histories, and the student association histories from a distinctly student perspective.)<sup>31</sup> Where student culture is the prime focus of investigation by educators, it has often been assumed to be a monolithic student culture, which is notable primarily for its difference from the official university culture. Smith cites American studies by educators and folklorists that fit this model but also notes other studies that identify subcultures within student bodies.<sup>32</sup> Horowitz's history of American student culture traces the evolution of three main groups with distinct identities and values over two hundred years of American campus life. She points out that the monolithic representation of students changes over time, according to what captures the imagination of the public: this does not mean that the other elements of student culture vanish, but that 'they were simply less visible or less interesting to reporters'<sup>33</sup>



*The capping committee of 1963 took care to present themselves to the city as responsible and conscientious young men. As an interface between student participants and city audience, MUSA officials were aware of maintaining workable town-gown relationships.*

©Manawatu Times, 28 March 1963

<sup>31</sup> See Elworthy, Hamilton, Hercok and Sharfe. Also relevant are W. B. Morrell, *The University of Otago: A Centennial History*, Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1969; Keith Sinclair, *A History of the University of Auckland*, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1983; W. J. Gardner, E. T. Beardsley and T. E. Carter, *A History of the University of Canterbury 1873-1973*, Christchurch: University of Canterbury, 1973; Rachel Barrowman, *Victoria University of Wellington, 1899-1999: A History*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1999

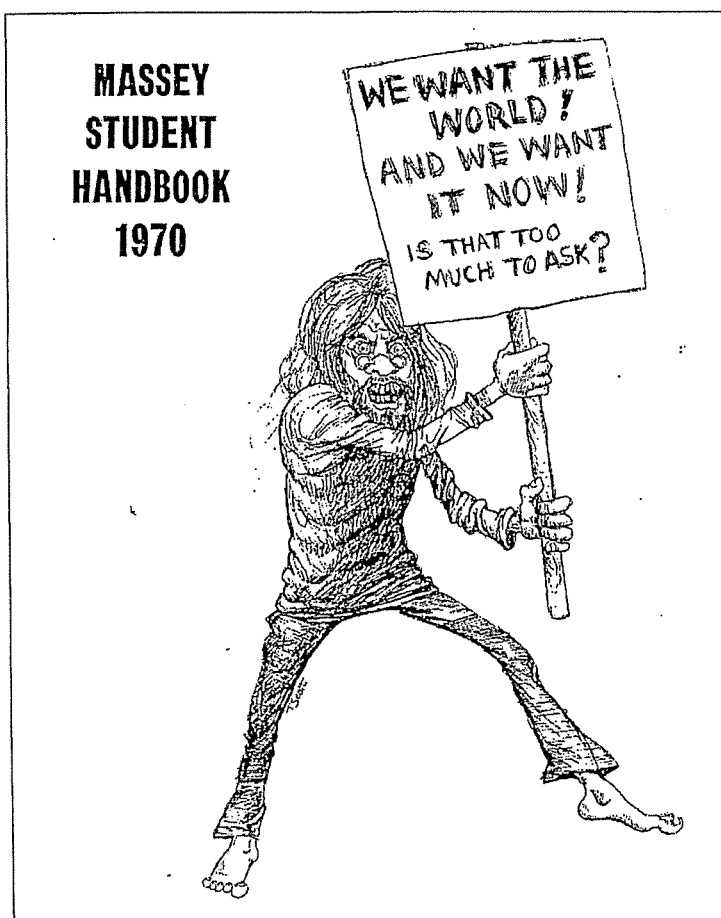
<sup>32</sup> Bronner (1990), Leary (1978), Becker (1963), Hartshorne (1957), cited in Smith, p.51 fit the 'monolithic' model, while Bolton and Kammeyer (1967), Clark and Trow (1966), Horowitz (1987), cited in Smith, p.51 focus on student subcultures.

<sup>33</sup> Horowitz, 1987, p.289



Students also define themselves, sometimes by what they consciously identify with – other university students, specific faculty groupings, clubs or societies on campus – but also by what they are not. A 1963 Chaff article, welcoming first year students, advises them to “Become a Student.” This may sound ridiculous. But merely because you have enrolled for some units which may lead to a degree does not mean that you are a Student.’<sup>34</sup> ‘Becoming’ a student meant acting and dressing in ways that were recognisable, if not readily definable. When asked how to spot a ‘scarfie’, one former student replied: ‘You just do. Students walking down

a street stick out. If you’ve been to university you can pick them out. Even if you haven’t, you can pick them out. You can’t pick out what makes them identifiable, but students are I think quite readily identifiable.’<sup>35</sup> There is an impression of students appearing distinct from the rest of the population, in an oppositional, ‘us-and-them’ way. This visibility also brings vulnerability, and students frequently refer to being judged by the greater community, often in a pejorative way. An article prepared by MUSA for a local newspaper in 1968 asserted that ‘Students, like any group in society, have been



*Tom Scott's 1970 wild-eyed confrontational hippy student provides a strong contrast to the consciously clean-cut image of his 1963 peers. Although a tongue-in-cheek comment on student motivation, it reflected a growing sense of self-interest amongst students.*

©MUSA

<sup>34</sup> Chaff, Volume XIV, Number 5, March 1963

<sup>35</sup> Interview subject, quoted in Smith, p.75 The Dictionary of Modern New Zealand Slang defines 'scarfie' as 'A (university, originally Otago) student, from the custom of wearing long scarves in institutional colours'.

stereotyped. The New Zealand public has them neatly pigeonholed. They are the “irresponsible beardies”; everyone can spot them; everyone knows what they are like.’<sup>36</sup>

So student culture has elements of invented tradition as well as being fluid in its boundaries, whether defined by students themselves or by their surrounding communities. This makes it problematic to assess the more fluid aspects of student culture in the same way that one might analyse other easily quantifiable elements of student life. Smith notes the tendency for studies of this kind to make generalizations and to focus on the typical: student festivals or cultural events are then omitted exactly because they are atypical.

The assumptions behind the study of cultural performance, on the other hand, argue that the extraordinary special events may reveal more, or at least a complementary view, of the culture of a group than a whole battery of tests and surveys. This study views culture as actively and self-consciously produced by the members of a group, and examines not what statistics say students are, but what students say about their identity by means of a cultural performance.<sup>37</sup>

Consideration of the theoretical characteristics of student festivals as an aspect of student culture provides a more focused lens for investigating Procesh and capping stunts. Although festivals are complex occasions, in that they are comprised of a range of genres and events, and thus have multiple models of discourse associated with them, it is the ludic aspect - symbolic inversion - that has attracted most attention from scholars. A fundamental premise of festival is that it exists as the converse of everyday behaviour and norms. This has provided the basis for investigating different facets of festivity. Pieper argued that the central antithesis was expressed in terms of work and play, festival being distinct from just the absence of work: ‘To celebrate a festival means to do something which is in no way tied to other goals, which has been removed from all ‘so that’ and ‘in order to’.<sup>38</sup> Capping celebrations fit this definition since, although they are inherently part of the university student experience, they function apart from the overall goal orientation of academic achievement. In addition to the distinctive mental attitude that Pieper asserts, Alessandro Falassi summarizes distinctive festival behaviour:

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<sup>36</sup> Article entitled ‘Students Could Give Society a Fresh Look at Itself, *Tribune*, 5 May 1968

<sup>37</sup> Smith, p.52

<sup>38</sup> Joseph Pieper, *In Tune with the World: A Theory of Festivity*, trans. R Winston and C. Winston, New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965, p.7

At festival times, people do something they normally do not; they abstain from something they normally do; they carry to the extreme behaviours that are usually regulated by measure; they invert patterns of daily social life.<sup>39</sup>

Within these parameters there are various ways of behaving differently, depending again on whether behaviour challenges or upholds established societal norms and values. 'Symbolic inversion' or 'reversal' will be used as a background reference point for examining the relationship between students and Palmerston North residents during capping time. Babcock defines symbolic inversion as 'any act of expressive behaviour which inverts, contradicts, abrogates, or in some fashion presents an alternative to commonly held cultural codes, values and norms'.<sup>40</sup> There have been differing scholarly opinions as to whether such inversion is subversive and, if so, whether it is a conscious challenge to the establishment or just joking.<sup>41</sup> Smith draws attention to the ambiguity of humour, and its importance to capping, stating,

It is appropriate to compare festive reversal to humour, particularly as festivals are full of humour of all kinds, including word play, jokes, satire and parody, playful aggression in which people pelt each other with inflated bladders or with bags of flour, and practical jokes. The last of these forms is particularly noted for rendering the playful frame ambiguous. All of these forms are present in capping, which is remarkable for its prominence of practical jokes.<sup>42</sup>

Although capping provides the opportunity for students to behave in ways that are outside of the established norms of their communities, such behaviour is not confined exclusively to capping time, as noted by the newspaper correspondent in the introduction to this study. Just as there are different subcultures of student values and norms, there may be variations in communally held societal norms too, and the behaviour exhibited to excess during capping may be a continuation of disorderly behaviour shown throughout the rest of the year.

What, then, is the mechanism that allows some members of a community to act in extraordinary ways not allowed of others? There are many opportunities for conflict at festival times and, although it may appear that order is then upended or suspended, considerable planning is necessary for these seemingly spontaneous events. The granting of 'licence' makes them possible: fundamentally a community-based process of

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<sup>39</sup> Alessandro Falassi, 'Festival: Definition and Morphology', in *Time Out of Time: Essays on the Festival*, Alessandro Falassi (ed.), Albuquerque: New Mexico Press, 1987, p.3

<sup>40</sup> Barbara Babcock, 'Introduction', in *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society*, Barbara Babcock (ed.), Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978, quoted in Smith, p.56

<sup>41</sup> Smith cites work by Max Gluckman and Victor Turner in this area, p.56

<sup>42</sup> Smith, p.59

negotiation or social interaction, members of a community decide to grant some of their number permission to 'break the rules'. This licence is sometimes contested: groups within the community may take the chance to push their causes through protest or, as Smith notes from a range of sources, there may be middle-class disapproval expressed on aesthetic or disorder grounds.<sup>43</sup>

Another significant feature of festival literature directly relevant to a study of capping is consideration of the involvement in, and benefit derived from, festivals. Most festivals are created by and for a discrete group with a shared identity: they are primarily esoteric in their orientation. Although audiences or bystanders may be present, they are incidental to the focus of the festival. An alternative to this model, provided by Abrahams, is to consider those events that are based on perceived dissimilarity rather than similarity, turning from an internal group focus to involving other groups as audiences or targets, to crossing boundaries between groups. <sup>44</sup> Smith connects his theory to capping thus:

The majority of festivals in the literature to date have a local rhetoric that proclaims the events' esoteric and unifying character – however that claim works out in the practice of the festival. Capping provides a strong contrast, because it is profoundly exoteric<sup>45</sup> in both rhetoric and function, holding the attention of both outsiders and insiders. In short, capping is a festival for and about town and gown... The insiders, and the most active participants in capping, are the students. However, much of capping is set in city streets and public spaces, and the non-student public is involved as audience, consumers, and targets.<sup>46</sup>

Drawing together strands of literature and theory relating to festival, ritual and student culture provides a background for looking at the specific case study of Massey students and Palmerston North residents at capping time: why students were granted licence to behave in extraordinary ways, and what parameters the civic authorities thought they were establishing for that licence (compared to the parameters perceived and extended by students.) While telling the stories of capping is entertaining and interesting in its own right, placing these stories in a continuum of festival studies adds to an wider understanding of their fundamentally human nature. This chapter, combined with the following chapter on the town-gown relationship between Massey and Palmerston North, will provide a structure for examining a decade of Procesh and capping stunts in a

<sup>43</sup> Smith cites studies by Brereton (1975); Davis (1982 and 1986); Kinser (1990); Wagner (1986), p.70

<sup>44</sup> Roger Abrahams, 'Shouting Match at the Border: the Folklore of Display Events', in *And Other Neighborly Names: Social Process and Cultural Image in Texas Folklore*, R. Bauman and R. Abrahams (eds.), p.306, cited in Smith, p.71

<sup>45</sup> *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Second edition) defines 'exoteric' as '1. Pertaining to the outside; external; 2. Communicated to outsiders; intelligible to the public.'

<sup>46</sup> Smith, p.72

contested environment of costs and benefits to each partner in the town-gown relationship.

## CHAPTER TWO: 'THE RATHER INSENSITIVE, STUDENT RESISTANT CROWD OVER "THE BRIDGE"'<sup>47</sup> - TOWN AND GOWN.

The students of Massey University College welcome the recent move made by the City Council to seek a full discussion between those concerned over capping activities, said a spokesman of the College Students' Association yesterday...[He] concluded by saying that the recent formation of Massey University College had brought Palmerston North nearer to the goal of becoming a university city, and it was important that 'town and gown' were given no cause to level criticism at each other. (*Manawatu Times*, 8 March 1963)

Get the President of StudAss and your Procesh controller together to arrange a meeting with the mayor, the traffic and police officials and a few councillors. I suggest this meeting be about a week before Procesh. Have a list of stunts ready for their approval. Tell them how successful capping was last year, and this year's capping will be the same, piss in their pockets and you'll get just about everything you want. (Capping Controller's Report, MUSA Annual Report 1963)

These two accounts of negotiations between the Student Association and City Council officials clearly illustrate students' awareness of the need to present a more acceptable public profile when dealing with their larger community, than their internal communications warranted. Bridge-building, or bridge crossing from the university to the city, was seen as important to both groups in 1963. The following decade of huge Massey growth, combined with shifts in popular culture and attitudes, brought changes to the relationship between town and gown as students and residents became less willing to accommodate each other.

This chapter will examine facets of interaction and attitudes between students and residents, and show changes that occurred from 1963-1973. Examining everyday societal attitudes provides an important basis for focusing on the exceptional nature of capping week, with its extremes of behaviour and subsequent reactions. The range of interactions can be divided into three broad areas: infrastructural and planning implications for the city, arising from the rapid growth of the university in this period; the history and nature of student interaction with city officials and residents, and the extent to which they change over time; and attitudes of city residents to students, and students to city residents, in general. A brief history of Massey's establishment will provide a base from which to examine these areas.

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<sup>47</sup> MUSA Annual Report, 1971



*Procesh, 1963: A funeral procession marks the demise of Massey Agricultural College, and the arrival of Massey as a university: the next decade brought many changes to both the university and its supporting city.*

©Manawatu Evening Standard, 1 April 1963

When Massey Agricultural College opened in 1928, on a site across the Manawatu river from Palmerston North, it was with the blessing and financial support of the local civic authorities. Palmerston North was chosen as the preferred location for the college from a range of possibilities throughout the North Island<sup>48</sup>: the land was suitable for agricultural research, there was already an established town of useful size with road and rail links, and its City Council was willing to purchase adjoining land to the proposed college site in order to seal the deal.<sup>49</sup> The Mayor of Palmerston North, A. G. Graham, went so far as to predict that Massey's ongoing development as an educational bastion would eventually see the city recognised as the 'Cambridge of New Zealand'.<sup>50</sup> From this ambitious beginning, the city (as it became in 1930) and the university (as it became in 1963) have both perceived social and financial benefits resulting from their cooperation. It has been an understated relationship: many publications generated by either partner in this town-gown association referred only briefly to the other, yet the growth of city and university,

<sup>48</sup> Lincoln College, near Christchurch, catered for a small number of agriculture students, and the need had long been expressed for a larger college in the North Island. See Brooking, Chapters 1 and 2 for comprehensive background.

<sup>49</sup> The City Council purchased the adjoining McHardy property, worth £10,000, on the condition that the favoured Batchelar site was purchased and a full-scale agricultural college established there.

<sup>50</sup> Brooking, p.52. Alternatively, Councillor Brian Elwood anticipated Palmerston North's evolution into 'the little Oxford of New Zealand' in 1966, as the Palmerston North City Council debated basing the city's image on being a university city. *MES*, 14 April 1966

especially in the period after Massey became a full university, were strongly intertwined.<sup>51</sup> Palmerston North was a relatively small provincial centre, unlike the more established universities' cities at the time<sup>52</sup>, and the influence of its infrastructure, staff and students as residents and financial contributors, on the life of the city was thus comparatively stronger.



*Rapid roll growth in the 1960s put pressure on Massey's hostel accommodation. This 1966 Procesh float satirizes the inadequacy of the older hostels, and highlights the PNCC's controversial decision to raise a £90,000 loan to provide a new hostel.*

©Manawatu Evening Standard, 2 April 1966

Representative of a largely conservative and pragmatic community, the PNCC invested most of its energies and interest in Massey in planning for the implications of the university's expansion. After attaining full university status, Massey's full time internal roll<sup>53</sup> showed strong sustained growth, with an annual average increase of 14.7% from 1964-1973.<sup>54</sup> A range of planning documents generated by the PNCC from 1970-1973

<sup>51</sup> Palmerston North's official centennial history, published in 1973, devotes two and a half pages to Massey's influence on the city, while Massey publications have tended to focus on the university as its own community.

<sup>52</sup> Waikato University in Hamilton, another provincial city, was established in 1964.

<sup>53</sup> The distinction between all internal students and fulltime internal students is made to show the impact of fulltime students upon the city, in terms of housing, transport and other municipal concerns. For this study, the fulltime student role is significant, as they were the main participants in Procesh and stunts.

<sup>54</sup>Gover, p.60



examined the impact of increased student and staff numbers for the infrastructure of the city. *University and City: An Introductory Assessment of the Impact of Massey University Upon Palmerston North* drew upon surveys done by MUSA and NZUSA and acknowledged the assistance of the Vice Chancellor and Registrar in providing statistical information about student numbers, housing and income, motor vehicles at Massey, expected government grants, and direct economic benefits to the city from the building programme and spending in the city. The report's compiler notes that 'The most easily measured impact which the University makes upon the city is its economic contribution. During the quinquennium 1965-1970 the city gained from university sources a sum approaching \$33 millions....At present the combined income potential from staff salaries and student income represents over 11.0% of the city's total income from salaries and wages.'<sup>55</sup> While the report also briefly acknowledged the 'cultural, social and educational impact' of the university by suggesting that 'the cultural and social life of the city is enriched and enhanced, and possibly changed, due to the influence of staff and students and by the ideas which are generated by and within the university', it dealt primarily with the considerable economic benefits that the city accrued from the university, and the attendant costs associated with rapid expansion in the period of this study.<sup>56</sup> This is apparent in a self-congratulatory excerpt from the city's official centennial history when, in response to a student accommodation shortage, and 'recognising it had some responsibility in the matter the City Council, in 1965, committed itself to a loan of £90,000 for the purpose of providing further student accommodation, and thus became the first local body to recognise this obligation in a practical manner.'<sup>57</sup> Local Presbyterian and Anglican churches also 'accepted a share of the responsibility of the city' and were active in providing halls of residence.<sup>58</sup> This indicates an active and direct engagement with 'town and gown' issues, indicative of a correlation between stronger connections and smaller communities. Smith's study of students at Victoria University of Wellington compares the 'tradition of mutual resentment' between town and gown in the capital city, and that of universities based in smaller New Zealand towns (Hamilton,

<sup>55</sup> PNCC Town Planning Office, *University and City: An Introductory Assessment of the Impact of Massey University upon Palmerston North*, B.D. Bang and J.C.B. Mercer (compilers), 1970, p.viii

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, p.iii. It is worth noting that at least one of the compilers of the report was a recent Massey graduate, which may explain his perspective.

<sup>57</sup> G.C. Petersen, *Palmerston North. A Centennial History*, Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1973, p.231. This volume does not mention the extended debate and vote needed for ratepayers' approval of the loan.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*

Dunedin and Palmerston North).<sup>59</sup> She attributes the difference in cordiality to smaller towns' dependence on the universities, a link made explicit by one interviewee's comparison of Palmerston North with Wellington:

[In a small university town like Palmerston North] half the people in it derive their living either directly or indirectly from the university. There the whole community is likely to get behind a graduation event. Not just students. If the students go on a bit of a drunken rampage it will be tolerated; it will be criticised, justifiably, by people, but they'll accept it a little more tolerantly than [Wellington].<sup>60</sup>

This perception of greater tolerance by residents of smaller towns, and by Palmerstonians in particular, becomes significant to a study of capping when students claimed licence to behave outside of the city's usual parameters for acceptable behaviour. Did the special nature of Massey in its agricultural college guise foster more harmonious relations between its students and city residents? Agriculture students may have been a more palatable or non-threatening alternative to other 'types' of university students, in a provincial centre traditionally based on rural servicing. Brooking comments on the conservative and 'close-knit' nature of early Massey Agricultural College students, that there was 'little place in a rural institution for left-wing activities.'<sup>61</sup> The granting of licence to this small elite group acknowledged their 'special' status, in a period when few New Zealanders achieved a tertiary education. This low-key tolerance of earlier Massey students may have set a precedent for later town-gown relationships and benefited later students' cause at capping time. Tolerance on the grounds of special status seems to have diminished in the 1970s as more of the population gained access to university education, and city residents had more direct connections with students. A 1967 study of social distance and student stereotypes presented survey participants with four cartoon images of students, ranging in appearance from a suit-and-tie conservative to a goatee-and-sandal beatnik. Results showed that respondents who had no contact with university or university students were very likely to choose the beatnik as an accurate representation, and to ascribe a range of negative behaviours to him.<sup>62</sup> As participation in university education grew, and more people had direct contact with students in their social circles,

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<sup>59</sup> Excerpt from an article on 'Town and Gown' in Victoria's student newspaper, *Spike*, 1937, quoted in Smith, p.77

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Nigel Mander, 1988, quoted in Smith, p.78

<sup>61</sup> Brooking, p.104

<sup>62</sup> Paul N Hamid, 'Social Distance and Stereotypes in Characterising University Students', in Stephen Webb and John Collette (eds.) *New Zealand Society, Contemporary Perspectives*, Sydney: John Wiley and Sons, 1973, pp.127-133

less 'special' features were attributed to them (for better or worse). As a result, they became more integrated into the community, which then was less willing to make exceptions for them.

This may partly explain why the PNCC allowed more leeway to students in the early 1960s, but showed signs of less tolerance a decade later. It is also important to consider whether the Council's stance came from a belief that students enriched or enlivened the city with stunts and Procesh, or reflected the financial incentive to accommodate them. Did residents consider student behaviour in the same way as did city officials? The evidence for both groups seems to indicate that these were all factors in their attitudes towards students and students at capping time.

Another significant aspect of town-gown attitudes, evident throughout New Zealand from the nineteenth century, and still arguably recognisable today, centres on perceptions of anti-intellectualism embedded within the social fabric of New Zealand society. Many accounts of New Zealand in the first half of the twentieth century refer to a stultifyingly dull cultural and intellectual climate, where many of those with talent and sensitivity felt compelled to leave New Zealand in search of a more sophisticated and sympathetic environment. J. C. Beaglehole refers in *The New Zealand Scholar* to 'the long story of the expatriates, the people who could live almost anywhere except at home'.<sup>63</sup> While this minority yearned for communities of ideas, 'many New Zealanders, perhaps the great majority, believed that the rural way of life was morally superior to that of the towns: it followed that the smallholder farmer's antagonism to urban sophistication had to be treated with respect.'<sup>64</sup> According to this argument, the influential and pragmatic values of the country's farmers translated into a widespread distrust of anything intellectual. Bill Pearson encapsulated this attitude in his introduction to a volume of Frank Sargeson stories, embodying it as:

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<sup>63</sup> J. C. Beaglehole, *The New Zealand Scholar*, Margaret Condliffe Memorial Lecture, Canterbury University College, 1954, p.6. Other sources for this general pattern include Katherine Mansfield, whose writing clearly identifies her frustration with the smallness and meanness of New Zealand society as it was when she left New Zealand. Expatriate scholars like Dan Davin and John Mulgan epitomize a generation of intellectuals who felt that, having left New Zealand for post-graduate study, there was nothing for them to return home for.

<sup>64</sup> P. J. Gibbons, 'The Climate of Opinion', in *The Oxford History of New Zealand* (second edition), G. W. Rice (ed.), Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992, p.320

...a crudity incarnated in the solid unimaginative flesh of Bill Massey...It was the ethos of the hard working small farmer impatient of all behaviour that did not self-evidently contribute to material gain or public decorum...It was a cultural climate in which reading was a waste of time, imagination an impractical self-indulgence, morality a programme of self-denial and the masking of personal passions except, perhaps, those of righteousness, envy and anger...<sup>65</sup>

W. B. Morrell similarly referred to a 'strain of anti-intellectualism in the New Zealand character, an undervaluing of brains in comparison with brawn, a suspicion of people whose interests – and sometimes their opinions also – are not shared with the common man.'<sup>66</sup> Universities provided a mixture of values, but awareness by students of their separation from the 'common man' was evident. A 1963 Massey 'fresher'<sup>67</sup> writing of his first term, displayed his scorn for working people: 'I am certainly glad not to be one of the "great unwashed"...with no fresh ideas, no new thoughts or concepts in their minds...content with the mundane mediocracy of their pitiful rat-race of an existence'.<sup>68</sup> This is another aspect of the dichotomous 'town-gown' relationship, contrasting anti-intellectualism with intellectual snobbery. A dichotomy between conservative and liberal elements on campus was also evident. Many students continued to endorse conservative, pragmatic values whilst at university.<sup>69</sup> There was, however, a subset of intellectual or cultural dissenters within the university system who felt that it was the right, and indeed the duty, of those in universities to promote alternative viewpoints and provoke wider thought within the community. The percentage of New Zealanders who acquired a university education remained very small throughout this period.<sup>70</sup> Perhaps because of this they considered themselves a part of, but also apart from, the rest of New Zealand society: their education qualified them, but also perhaps compelled them, to assume leadership roles in their communities or in wider New Zealand society. Massey students expressed this sense of responsibility from the early agricultural college days through to the period of this study, in earnest editorials promoting community service and

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<sup>65</sup> Frank Sargeson (with introduction by Bill Pearson), *Collected Stories, 1935-1963*, Auckland: Blackwood and Janet Paul, 1964, p.5

<sup>66</sup> W. B. Morrell, *The University of Otago: A Centennial History*, Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1969, p. 241

<sup>67</sup> Contemporary university slang for a first-year student.

<sup>68</sup> *Chaff*, Volume XIV, Number 8, June 1963, p.3

<sup>69</sup> Brooking discusses the 'conservative' rather than 'Conservative' nature of earlier Massey students, noting that 'there was little place in a rural institution for left-wing activities' P.104

<sup>70</sup> In 1961 0.7% of the population were enrolled at university; by 1971 this had increased to 2.9%. *Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives*, 1962, 1972, Section E1; *Census of the New Zealand Population*, 1961, 1971

dissemination of new ideas, and in Student Association reports that sought promotion of students' public image through doing good works publicly.<sup>71</sup>

Even at Massey, with its conservative and agricultural history, staff and students debated their roles – and that of the university in general – as agents of provocative ideas. The growth of the University's arts and sciences faculties throughout the 1960s added to the debate. A range of articles and letters to the editor of local newspapers in 1968 showed some willingness to engage with the issues of academic freedom, the university's role in the community and student participation in questioning the status quo. An article entitled 'Should Universities Challenge Assumptions by which We Live?', written by an Education faculty member for the *Tribune*, begins 'A University...demands a great deal from the community in which it exists. It demands its keep and (what may be more difficult to give) it demands its indulgence, for it is a place where the most important prejudices which may be essential for the stability of its surrounding community, may have to be questioned, and perhaps destroyed.'<sup>72</sup> A letter to the editor the month before had written that 'it should not be a comfortable thing for a city to have a university in its midst', going on to argue that, although university staff have a role in promoting debate, 'as older members of that established society they are less likely to express the fresh and extreme view which the student can...but in Palmerston North and in New Zealand the university community appears to silently conform in a conformist society.' The letter ends by suggesting possible reasons for this silence, concluding that, student workloads and complacency notwithstanding, 'the university fears controversy as much as the community is intolerant of dissent.'<sup>73</sup> An editorial published the following week is worth quoting at length, as it highlighted the issues of student presence, university 'freedoms', and the significance of the town-gown relationship to their expression:

#### **What is our relationship with Massey?**

Does the presence of a university here mean much to Palmerston North? Could the university play a larger part in city life? If the university does not mean as much as it could to the city, is it because the city will not let it?

It is time the people of Palmerston North examined the relationship between Massey University and the city through study of questions such as these.

<sup>71</sup> Brooking, p.129, summarises early students 'evangelical sense of reforming mission', and *Chaff* has examples of Capping Committee articles that discuss Proceash charitable collections in these terms – *Chaff*, Volume XIX Number 4, February 1967, p.8

<sup>72</sup> *The Tribune*, 16 June 1968

<sup>73</sup> Letter to the Editor from P. D. Buckley, *MES*, 1 May 1968

Anti-university feeling has been a rather inexplicable part of the New Zealand scene for many years. A number of Palmerston North residents keep it alive here, seemingly finding it hard to say a good word about Massey and its students.

There are others, of course, who are highly pro-university. But in between there is the majority who, while accepting Massey, make no effort to involve themselves in it and to welcome university involvement in city society.

Universities, by their nature, attract much of what is best in the country – the best young brains, the future leaders of business, politics and the community, and the most talented in the fields of art, music and drama.

It would seem natural that any community would welcome such a concentration of talent in its city, and the attention and opinions of fresh, bright young minds, and the enthusiasms they generate.

Universities are places of education, and as education is the planting and growth of new thoughts and attitudes, and since these know no physical boundaries, then the benefits of education from the university should filter throughout the community in which it exists.

The presence of a university should enrich the educational and cultural understanding of everyone in this city, not just its students.

Has this happened here to any marked degree? Has a vacuum been allowed to grow between the university and the city? Massey students seem to think it has.<sup>74</sup>

An accompanying article written by the Students' Association expresses student frustration at 'society's' inability to see past stereotypical images of students to what they have to contribute.<sup>75</sup>

The timing of this editorial was significant. In the five years since Massey became a full university its internal culture had been forced to adapt from a young (largely conservative) male profile to incorporate more women, more racial minorities and more liberal arts and science students.<sup>76</sup> Another groundswell of change affected those within and without the university, as the manifestations of a popular 'youth culture' and 'countercultural' ideas became more visible in dress codes and social attitudes.<sup>77</sup> Letters to the editor condemning students for their unkempt appearance often connected their dress style with lack of physical and moral cleanliness.<sup>78</sup> Questioning of established societal values and practices became, if not more acceptable, more common, and newspaper extracts display that awareness of reassessing the role of universities – and of

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<sup>74</sup> *The Tribune*, editorial, 5 May 1968

<sup>75</sup> 'Students Could Give Society a Fresh Look at Itself', *The Tribune*, 5 May 1968

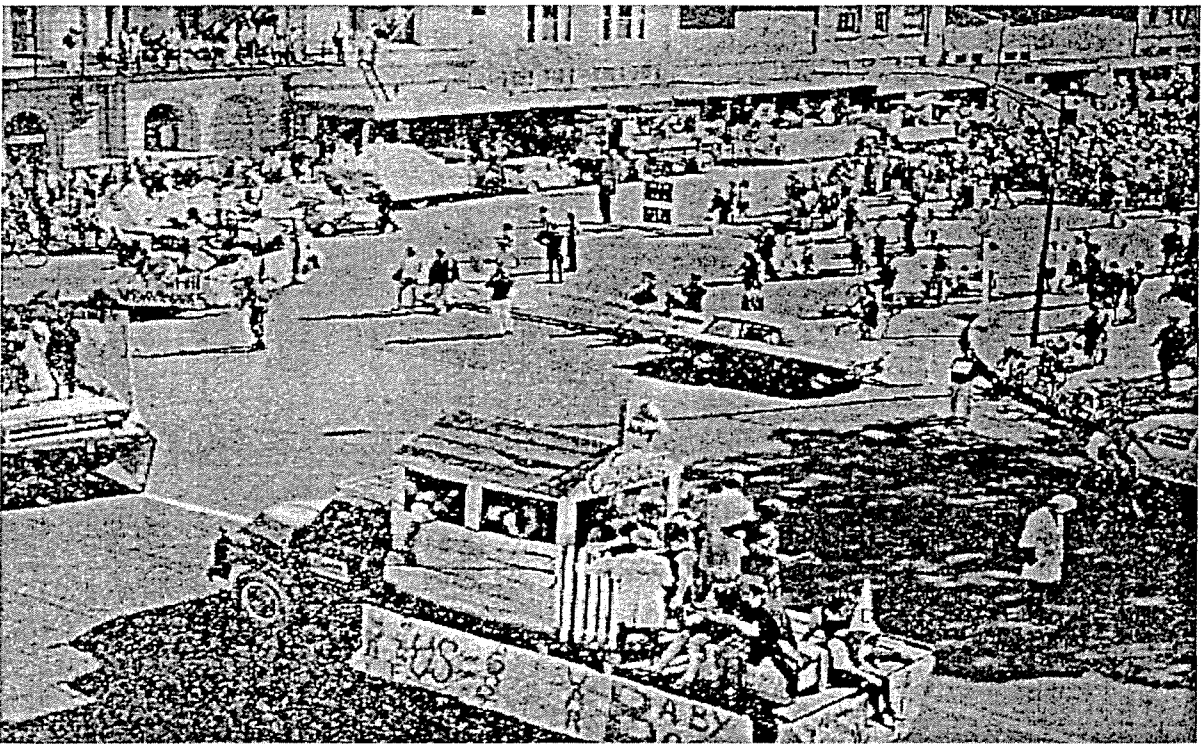
<sup>76</sup> International students became a larger section of the student population, through aid programmes like the Colombo Plan and other educational aid programmes.

<sup>77</sup> See Donna Soo, particularly Chapters 1 and 4, for further information on New Zealand 'youth culture' in this period.

<sup>78</sup> 'Anti-Dirty Student' provoked responses from a conservative student who supported his stance, and others which attacked his negative stereotype of student protestors and his 'self-imposed prison of mediocre arrogance'. *MES*, 4 July 1968

students - in society. Within this current of potential for change, both sides seem to despair of the inherent conservatism displayed by both town and gown.

Despite changes in appearance and social attitudes, city officials, residents and students appear to have overcome many of their differences at capping time. Students and civic officials seemed aware of the need to, at least publicly, show mutual goodwill, despite friction over limits imposed and crossed. A 1972 Capping Committee report summarises a meeting with PNCC Traffic Committee officials, where they indicated their willingness to cooperate with Procesh, but requested that students 'not interfere with the city's sentimentalities – the Cenotaph and the Te Awe Awe statue.'<sup>79</sup> Mayoral parties were an integral part of Procesh speeches, invited by the students and actively engaging in the humour of the nonsensical atmosphere. Residents too generally knew what to expect from Procesh and stunts, and gave generously to the annual charity collection run concurrently with Procesh.



*Crowds of city residents and supporting students watch Procesh arrive in the Square in 1966. Palmerstonians were generally appreciative of witty and well-constructed floats, often made with materials supplied by local businesses. ©Manawatu Evening Standard, 21 April 1966*

<sup>79</sup> Capping Committee minutes, 15 March 1972.

The sense of community engagement with Procesh evident in this 1963 newspaper report provides a useful point from which to consider, over the following chapters on Procesh and Stunts, changes over time in actions and attitudes:

#### STUDENTS CAVORT IN CITY STREETS

...Massey University College students and thousands of citizens who stopped work or shopping to stand and watch when the annual Massey 'Procesh' cavorted its way through the Palmerston North city centre early yesterday afternoon.

For an hour the normally quiet, yet busily conservative commercial centre, was virtually hit by a whirlwind of laughing, screaming students, gaily, and in some cases, satirically decorated floats, and spectators – thousands of them all following or joining in the procesh...

Office workers and shop girls not at lunch took a few minutes off to watch the spectacle. Workmen engaged on the new C.M.L. building in the Square caused a minor diversion when they pelted floats with odd food scraps and peel...

The Procesh wound up at the Clocktower where Lord and Lady Massey were welcomed to the city by the Mayor, Mr. G. M. Rennie. While Lord Massey read his speech from a roll of toilet paper, Lady Massey, a husky beauty with thick, hairy legs and traces of a beard, made coy advances to Mr. Rennie. Mr. Rennie, obviously enjoying himself and making only feeble attempts to fend the lovely Lady Massey off, really earned applause and cheers from the crowd at the base of the tower, when, at the end of the speech making, he lead the Maori warriors chanting "Kamate, kamate"<sup>80</sup>

The historical relationship between Massey and Palmerston North did much to alleviate opportunities for tension at capping time, yet through the next decade shifts in perceptions of rights and responsibilities did bring town and gown into conflict. The next chapter on Procesh discusses negotiations, accommodations and ultimatums, as well as floats, haka parties and hirsute Lady Masseys.

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<sup>80</sup> *Manawatu Times*, 2 April 1963



## CHAPTER THREE: 'TO PLEASE ALL AND OFFEND NONE'? PROCESH 1963-1973<sup>81</sup>

### Students Invade Square

Seriousness was shattered; noon traffic was disrupted; and movement around the Square came to a standstill today when Palmerston North was invaded. The "invaders" – known in saner moments as students of Massey University – were staging their once-a-year capping procession.<sup>82</sup>

This excerpt from local newspaper coverage of Massey's 1965 Proceh invites consideration of Proceh's immediate impact on the city, in terms of physical disruptions to traffic and order, but also to the everyday ethos of community and commerce at work, as the city's residents adapted their normal activities to such invasion. Facilitating these manifestations of 'student invasion' was an organised network of PNCC officials, police and MUSA officeholders who had negotiated the conditions under which Proceh could occur. Although Proceh was associated with spontaneity, or even anarchy, by its participants and audience, this effect was achieved through much planning and mediation in the granting of formal permits and temporary licence. Explicit and implicit parameters for student behaviour were constantly renegotiated by MUSA's Capping Committees, and pushed to their furthest acceptable limits by individual students involved in Proceh. City Council officials and police had the power to determine the explicit conditions for Proceh by imposing restrictions on its timing and route, as well as the direct involvement of police and traffic officers, in order to qualify for a parade permit. The implicit parameters of expected behaviour codes were not so clear, as the norms which city officials deemed self-evident were challenged and sometimes deliberately flouted by students. Limits of acceptable transgression by students sometimes became clear only when crossed, delineated by sanctions and public outcry. Proceh, then, was always a contested domain: it always had to be negotiated, and was always subject to challenges to it and within it. The licence granted to students by the city's officials and residents was never unanimously endorsed as universal consent or permission to invert societal norms. The

<sup>81</sup> This title comes from the heading of an article on the 1963 Capping Committee, fully entitled: 'Planning Massey Capping: Aim is to please all and offend none', *Manawatu Times*, 28 March 1963

<sup>82</sup> *MES*, 26 April 1965

range of reactions to Procesh from people on either side of the town-gown divide is testimony to the fluidity and complexity of this event.

This chapter will examine aspects of a decade of Procesh in Palmerston North, looking at examples of change in attitudes and actions by students and city residents. Negotiations between civic authorities and MUSA will be examined in terms of the planning needed for each year's event and attitudes of each 'side'. MUSA's increasing reluctance to follow the PNCC's guidelines for the annual charity collection run on Procesh day will be examined for evidence of these attitudes. The Community Chest episode was a source of tension for most of the decade, and highlights shifts in students' push for greater autonomy, both within and outside of the university. A summary of the subject matter of Procesh floats will show prominent themes of student culture, as well as a background of contemporary issues. There was strong public reaction to some floats, but also many reports of widespread enjoyment and tolerance exhibited by the public audience. Yet within the decade of this study, Procesh became less of a priority for students, and subject to stricter controls by the city. Possible reasons for these attitudes and subsequent decline in interest will be discussed.

In the space of this particular decade there were changes within the university system and within the student body, changes in the interactions between MUSA and the PNCC, and changes in city residents' attitudes to Procesh, all of which affected the organisation and content of Procesh. Yet within this atmosphere of continual negotiation there were constants. The underlying goodwill inherent in the relationship between Massey University and Palmerston North City Council helped to mitigate episodes of friction at capping time.

While Palmerston North residents had become familiar with solemn and decorous Anzac Day parades, student processions presented a strong contrast in content and motivation. The first Procesh in 1935 established the basic route of the student procession across the bridge from Massey, down Fitzherbert Avenue and ending up in the

Square for speeches and optional immersion in the duck pond.<sup>83</sup> Of this precedent-setting affair, Brooking wrote that it was seen as establishing a tradition held by other New Zealand universities and that, in Palmerston North, 'public reaction was...generally favourable, apart from a small but vocal minority who still write indignant letters to the editor during capping week. University processions always seem to have succeeded in shocking somebody.'<sup>84</sup> That they should have 'succeeded' indicates a conscious effort to shock or disturb, as well as to entertain: this too, has been a constant of Procesh, and capping in general, at Massey.

Summarizing the physical nature of Procesh over the decade provides a sense of changing values and targets of humour or satire. Procesh provided a forum for both entertaining and provocative ideas, manifested in floats made by students. The Capping controller for 1968, echoing earlier committees' advice to students, wrote 'Procesh Day [is when] the populace is treated to a sample of student comment and humour. It is also the time for students to show benevolence and collect for charity.'<sup>85</sup> Student organisers showed awareness of the importance of producing a spectacle for the public, and often explicitly linked this with the size of the charity collection: 'Massey's procession of decorated floats...provides students with the opportunity to lampoon public figures, comment on topical events, indulge in student humour and we hope place the donating public in a generous frame of mind.'<sup>86</sup> A 1963 *Chaff* article promoting student involvement in capping encouraged a positive attitude to collecting: 'Let's put a smile on our face and ASK people for a donation, let's not amble behind the crowd rattling a tin, looking like George Wilder in handcuffs.'<sup>87</sup> From the beginning of the academic year students were exhorted to get together in hostel groups, clubs and societies to plan and build floats for Procesh. Some city residents displayed their 'generous frame of mind' by practically assisting in the production of floats, as in the 1963 parade: 'the majority of floats are mounted on vehicles on loan from Palmerston North business houses, and all materials for decorations are donated by local citizens.'<sup>88</sup> (Although the time and effort

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<sup>83</sup> Brooking, p.112

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*, p.118

<sup>85</sup> *Massey University Orientation Handbook*, 1968, p.12

<sup>86</sup> *Chaff* Special Open Day Edition, Volume XV Number 3, March 1964, p.3

<sup>87</sup> *Chaff*, Volume XIV, Number 6, March 1964, p.3 George Wilder was a notorious prison escapee of the period.

<sup>88</sup> *Manawatu Times*, 28 March 1963

invested in float construction varied throughout the decade, the use of borrowed vehicles continued for larger floats.) The number of floats involved varied from 'a dozen or so' in 1965 (when bad weather, and Easter tournament in the preceding week<sup>89</sup>, seemed to have discouraged some students) to thirty registered floats in 1972. In addition to mounted floats, there were usually several foot floats and an assortment of clowns, animals and costumed students to add to the spectacle.

Broad categories of subject matter for floats included internal Massey concerns, local community issues or politics, national politics or personalities, international affairs and popular culture. Floats focused on student and university culture targeted university developments – the horse-drawn hearse of 1963, proclaiming the death of Massey Agricultural College and the arrival of Massey University College – as well as perennial student preoccupations like the hostels and cafeteria. In 1964, Lord and Lady Massey, the students' self-proclaimed Procesh aristocracy, were joined in the parade by General Studies and his wife The Queen of Arts, publicly heralding the incorporation of liberal arts subjects into the university curriculum. Local issues also invited comment: offal was thrown from a float satirising a Longburn freezing works dispute in 1970, reflecting Massey's agricultural connections in a particularly unsophisticated manner.<sup>90</sup> 'Town-gown' links were highlighted in floats that commemorated Palmerston North's centennial in 1971, and condemned the City Council's attitude to student collections in 1968. National issues represented on floats ranged from the 'Constipational Society' demand for a second house in the New Zealand parliament<sup>91</sup> (1964) to personalities such as Robert Muldoon as Minister of Finance, and Patricia Bartlett as protector of New Zealand's morals (1968 and 1972).

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<sup>89</sup> Easter Tournament is an annual New Zealand inter-university sporting competition.

<sup>90</sup> Newspaper reports noted the 'spattering' of offal in the Square, but were careful to add that no one was hit by it. *MES*, 9 April 1970

<sup>91</sup> Presumably this society was a slightly less respectable complement to the Constitutional Society, and the nature of the second house requested may have differed.



*The organisers of this protest against the Vietnam war, at the tail of the 1971 Proceh, aimed to provoke an emotional response from onlookers. Political themes were strong throughout the decade, but this blood-soaked group departed from students' usual humorous or satirical stance to make their point.*

©Manawatu Evening Standard, 22 April 1971

International politics were strongly evident in float content throughout the decade, although the motivation behind the floats seemed to become more pointed or serious, and less gently mocking and entertaining than previously. This was evident in the 1971 Proceh, when a group of students sought and gained permission to use Proceh as a forum for their Vietnam War protest.<sup>92</sup> Press coverage depicted students 'bathed in blood' providing a pungent and sombre end to the parade, and an accompanying photograph showed a student with a hand-held sign saying 'You fought Hitler, Oppose Nixon' in a

<sup>92</sup> Manifestations of 1960s and 1970s youth protest culture in New Zealand were generally a watered down version of those conveyed in press and television reports from American universities. Tim Shadbolt's book *'Bullshit and Jellybeans'*, Wellington: Alister Taylor, 1971, described his involvement in a range of protest activity in this period, and portrayed his sense of alienation from the majority of New Zealanders' narrow-mindedness. He described trying to shut down an Auckland capping week event on the day that Cambodia was invaded, and how only a few hundred out of two thousand students left in protest. (p.136) Although these students were always a minority on campus, they were highly visible.

direct generational targeting of older city residents.<sup>93</sup> (The float directly preceding the protest was based on a contemporary television show, 'Dad's Army', and had a cannon aimed at the protestors, perhaps indicating dissent between student subcultures.) Many floats echoed wider New Zealand interest in international political issues throughout the decade: the Common Market and 'I'm Backing Britain' floats reflected concern for export markets, while those targeting Japanese fishing in New Zealand waters (floats in 1964, 1968 and 1971) and French nuclear testing in the Pacific may have been indicative of a growing awareness of New Zealand's place in the Pacific. International students' increasing visibility on campus was reflected in floats constructed by Malaysian, Singaporean and Fijian students from 1968 onwards.



*Changes in gender and cultural composition of Massey students was reflected in increasing numbers of floats that celebrated minorities on campus. This float of 'rugged society' Malaysian students appeared in the 1970 Procesh.*

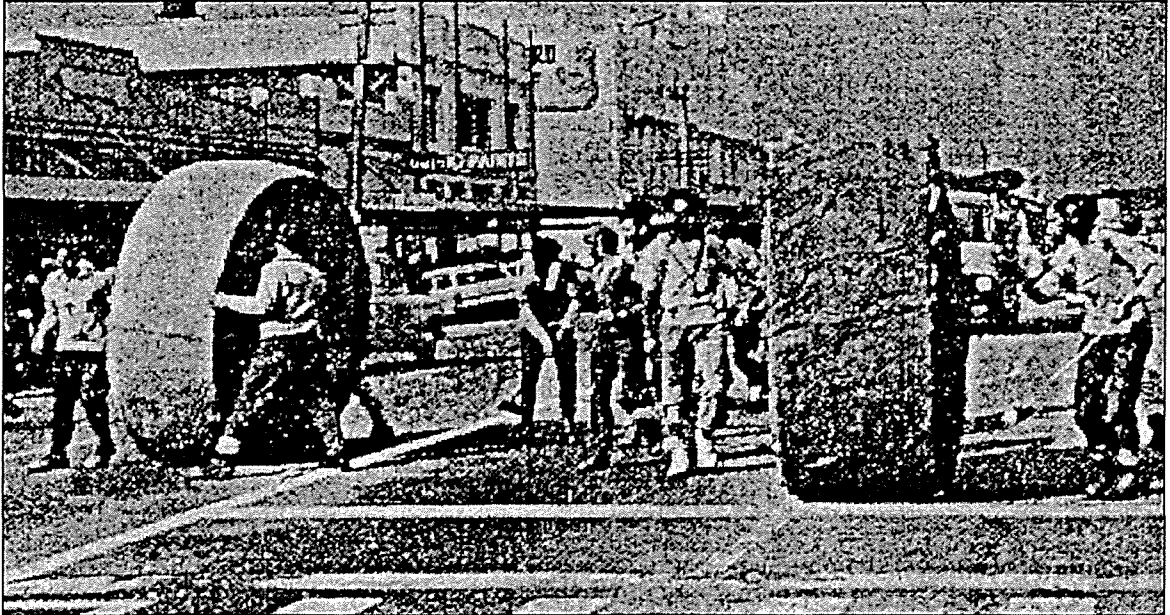
©Manawatu Evening Standard, 9 April 1970

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<sup>93</sup> MES, 22 April 1971



Procesh also reflected popular culture icons and attitudes of the 1960s and early 1970s. In 1964, four *papier-mache* Beatles pursued by pest killers entertained the crowd, followed in 1965 by a collection of large Rolling Stones, each with a student inside. The 1964 New Zealand release of the film 'Cleopatra' provided the motivation for a large Sphinx to make its way up Fitzherbert Avenue, accompanied by an assortment of foot soldiers and handmaidens. These well-constructed floats met the simple goal of entertaining the public, while others were deliberately more provocative. Student preoccupation with sexual innuendo was common, and usually stretched the limits of 'good taste' as far as possible without the parade's censors banning them from participation. This was not confined to Massey students or to this period. Brooking describes a baby Austin driven through Palmerston North as part of the first Procesh in 1935, 'which dangled a women's clothes dummy out of its front window with panties placed strategically around its ankles.'<sup>94</sup> while Victoria University had its entire Procesh banned after university authorities - and city residents - failed to see the humour in a particularly suggestive float in the 1936 Procesh.<sup>95</sup> In this case, some students stretched their licence to breaking point.



*The 'Rolling Stones' Massey-style provided entertainment for onlookers – and nausea for the hapless students inside each 'stone'.*

©Manawatu Evening Standard, 26 April 1965

<sup>94</sup> Brooking, p. 118

<sup>95</sup> Smith, p.168-169 (The float was based around a contemporary advertising slogan for petrol 'I'm flat out on Ethyl')



*Students built floats that reflected their own interests, and the growing importance of a 'youth culture' like this well-constructed float of 'pop culture' icons, the Beatles - and the Rolling Stones.*

©Manawatu Evening Standard, 14 April 1964

Strong growth in the number of women enrolled at Massey in the 1960s was significant, as the previously largely male student population was compelled to adapt and incorporate women into the university environment on a greater scale than previously.<sup>96</sup> For Procesh, this meant more helpers and participants, anticipated in a local newspaper article about 1963 Capping Week: 'one will expect to see a greater number of the women participating

<sup>96</sup> Lesley Courtney's 2000 BA (Hons) research exercise, "A Feminine Enrolment": Recovering Women Students at Massey Agricultural College 1932-1963' provides a good sense of the experience of women students before Massey became a university.



in the various activities throughout the week.’<sup>97</sup> Apart from the conventional Miss Massey beauty contest float that appeared from 1965-1970 and a reference to the increased ‘glamour’ of Procesh due to involvement of ‘the weaker sex’ in 1964, women’s contributions to Procesh seem to have been quickly incorporated to the extent that they were singled out for attention in the press only when seeming to deviate from the ‘norms’ for young women, or when they clearly reinforced them. Representations of women varied from ‘one young girl, dressed in a plain and ragged shift [with] blood down the front’<sup>98</sup> in the Vietnam float, to young city women portrayed as giggling ‘young innocents’ swept up in the mayhem.<sup>99</sup> Floats based on the ‘battle of the sexes’ appeared throughout the decade, with Women’s Liberation satirised in the 1970s. A 1972 ‘Men’s Lib’ float pulled by a team of women suggests that conservative young men still held sway in Procesh, if not in all other student affairs.

A manifestation of this highly visible student sub-culture, at Massey as at the other New Zealand universities, was the ‘haka party’. This consisted of a large group of young men dressed in grass skirts with darkened skin or crudely painted body decoration, whose knowledge and appreciation of Maori culture seemed peripheral to their capping week activities of drinking and selling copies of *Masskerade* throughout the North Island. They were often at the forefront of Procesh, although towards the end of the decade there is evidence of challenges to their display from other students. The haka party received strong coverage in the local press, and over the decade a photograph of the haka party in the Square’s duck pond was almost obligatory. One account of the 1964 Procesh reported that

The procession was led into the centre of the city by the traditional haka party and a strong smell of cocoa as they went past gave one the impression that not all the members, if any, were Maoris. However, what they lacked in authenticity they made up for with enthusiasm.<sup>100</sup>

This particular representation of students clearly appealed to newspaper editors, as it fitted a perception of Procesh as irreverent and anarchic and, in the earlier Massey tradition, young and male. This relates to Horowitz’s concept of monolithic representation of students, where only that which captures the imagination of the public

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<sup>97</sup> *MES*, 27 March 1963

<sup>98</sup> *MES*, 22 April 1971

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *MES*, 13 April 1964. In other reports, haka party members are described as ‘caramel’ in colour.

is publicized.<sup>101</sup> Other elements of student culture remain, but are 'simply less visible or interesting to reporters'. The visibility of haka parties, combined with their collective identity as heavy drinkers, led capping committees to try to moderate their public behaviour, euphemistically described in a 1968 MUSA report as 'a bit rough'.<sup>102</sup> Earlier attempts to postpone any alcohol consumption until after the public parade were hopeful but unsuccessful, and the 1969 committee compromised by passing a motion that only 'one jug of beer per man be given to the haka party before procesh'.<sup>103</sup> In addition, the committee, in its suggestions for the following year, recommended that 'in future Haka Party members should use more discretion, when tattooing themselves, in trying not to be too offensive'.<sup>104</sup> Discretion was not a term synonymous with the haka party. Attempts to rein them in further highlighted a growing gulf between students mindful of not exceeding limits of public taste and those who claimed a 'traditional' right to do just that, and was perhaps indicative of a similar gulf between radical and conservative students apparent by the late 1960s.<sup>105</sup> When a member of the haka party's skirt caught alight after Procesh in 1972, there were originally suggestions that it had been deliberate, and a police inquiry was launched.<sup>106</sup> Although it was later established that it had been an accident, clearly, as with many other aspects of capping the haka party had become a contested domain. What had been enjoyed, accepted, or tolerated for many years, became seen by some as anachronistic and offensive.

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<sup>101</sup> Referred to in Chapter One.

<sup>102</sup> Capping Controller's Report, MUSA Annual Reports, 1968

<sup>103</sup> Capping Committee minutes, 16 March 1969

<sup>104</sup> Capping Committee minutes, 22 June 1969. The minutes do not refer to the demographic of those who may find the haka party offensive, but the reference to the nature of tattoos suggests cultural or racial offence taken. No further reference to public antipathy toward the haka party could be found amongst other complaints.

<sup>105</sup> Other campuses had similar clashes between proponents and opponents of haka parties. The most notable of these was at Auckland University, where, in 1979, young Maori activists physically confronted a group of engineering students practicing their 'haka', after years of objections to their parodying of Maori culture. See Sinclair, p.293 and Hercock, Fay, *A Democratic Minority. A Centennial History of the Auckland University Students' Association*, Auckland University Press, 1994, p.105-106

<sup>106</sup> *MES*, 13-14 April 1972, and *Evening Post*, 14 April 1972 Part of the conditions for running Procesh for 1973 was the compulsory flameproofing of haka party skirts.



*Local newspaper coverage of the haka party in Procesh was strong for much of the 1960s. In this 1963 photograph the Mayor, Mr Gilbert Rennie, leads them in an impromptu rendition of 'Kamate, kamate' to their mutual enjoyment.*

©Manawatu Times, 2 April 1963

Similarly, the introduction of a Miss Massey beauty contest in 1965, when increasing numbers of women enrolled made such a contest viable, was successfully challenged only six years later in 1971.<sup>107</sup> This marks a significant shift in perceptions of women's roles at Massey from that of the contest's originators in 1965, or those expressed in a letter to *Chaff* in 1954 commenting on male students' attitudes to the small number of women on campus: 'women...are not considered as being capable of carrying out intelligent conversation. They are only looked upon as a source of mild spasmodic flirtation with which men satisfy their ego.'<sup>108</sup> It should be noted that the decision to dispense with Miss Massey was made by a small group of students who, by their involvement with student

<sup>107</sup> Capping Committee minutes note discussion on 'the subject of whether or not to have [a] Miss Massey "flesh parade" [to] quote Tom Scott, who is sick of Miss Pastoral Queen contest, Miss Blast Furnace and Miss Septic Tank etc.' (Capping Committee minutes, 18 March 1971.) It was raised again in the meeting of 31 March 1971, when the committee, with Student Executive backing, voted it out of existence. This was in keeping with most other universities, although in each case there was support for retaining the contests.

<sup>108</sup> Cited in Lesley Courtney, "A Feminine Enrolment": Recovering Women Students of Massey Agricultural College 1932-1963', BA (Hons) research exercise, 2000, p.42

politics and organisation, were in a position to effect change. They did not necessarily reflect attitudes held by a majority of the student body.

Disparities between student subcultures sometimes led to conflict between MUSA and its student membership. This was particularly noticeable in differing attitudes to the city authorities at capping time, as student officials took responsibility for, but could not completely control, the student body. Minutes and reports of Capping Committees and Executive meetings frequently referred to the diplomacy required when dealing with civic officials who had the power to disrupt or prevent Procesh. Many of these reports made explicit the connection between student behaviour and Palmerston North's reactions to it, as in this excerpt from the 1968 President's annual report:

It should be made quite clear that both over Capping and throughout the academic year, students can and do receive liberties that, except for their position, they would not otherwise be able to achieve. These liberties must in no circumstances be taken away from us through the irresponsible actions of various members of minority groups in the Association.<sup>109</sup>

The report went on to mention MUSA's 'slightly uneasy' relationship with Police censors of Procesh floats, but acknowledged the necessity of conforming in order to gain other concessions. The Capping Controller's report in 1971 showed less inclination to accept all conditions imposed on the running of Procesh, asserting that 'the City Council and especially the Traffic Department used the threat of Procesh cancellation to ensure good behaviour but these blackmail tactics should not be tolerated.'<sup>110</sup> The 1965 Capping Controller, in his recommendations to the following year's committee, also indicated wariness of, and by, the police when he wrote:

Providing you're firm but at the same time diplomatic you should find them ready to cooperate. Inspector Charles is a good man, but the Superintendent is a bit of a pessimist and requires careful handling – be careful not to burn his fingers.<sup>111</sup>

Police concerns at capping time centred on preparation for the disruption that Procesh inevitably caused: inconvenience to traffic along the parade route; censoring of floats to avoid public offence; disorder associated with the large number of students gathered in the city centre; and students' alcohol consumption before and after Procesh itself. Apart from temporary disruptions to traffic flow and everyday order, which were generally

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<sup>109</sup> MUSA Annual Report, 1968

<sup>110</sup> Capping Controller's Report, MUSA Annual Report, 1971

<sup>111</sup> Capping Controller's Report, MUSA Annual Report, 1965

tolerated by city residents, the most visible - and negative - feature of police concern appeared to be student drunkenness and its effects. Students frequenting city hotels were the target of some public disapproval, based on their age, gender and relative states of inebriation. A letter to the editor in 1966 condemns both underage students for public displays of drunkenness, and the police for allowing it, whether in capping week or not:

I visited two hotels in the city during the lunch hour...and after the parade, curious to see how many juveniles were in the bars. I would say at least 50 percent were under 21 years and not all males either; females were included...Last week I saw outside the Commercial Hotel young students who were obviously not 21, sitting in the gutter being sick, others leaning out of car doors to vomit, and young lads, whether they were students or not does not matter, lying on the park benches, and staggering over the road and footpaths making a general nuisance of themselves.

I do not think this type of performance is going to improve the citizens' outlook on voting for the £90,000 loan, as they do not deserve it; or do they? I do not think that we should blame the students, but the police force for letting this happen.<sup>112</sup>

In an official police response, Inspector Charles noted the 'special effort' exerted by the police on Procesh day, with 'seven or eight additional senior constables and three sergeants' on patrol, in addition to their censoring of floats. Banning floats due to obscenity or poor taste happened infrequently, although occasional communication gaps between police censors and student float-builders occurred. When a student questioned why police wanted the word 'fecundity' removed from a float, the police censor supposedly replied, "I don't know what it means but it looks rude."<sup>113</sup>

The Inspector also noted that hotels, and MUSA, had received special warnings about 'underage drinkers'<sup>114</sup>, with infringements leading to police prosecution. He concluded by saying that with almost three thousand students in the city at one time, 'a few were bound to overstep the mark.'<sup>115</sup> A 1967 report on some city hotels refusing to serve students referred to Inspector Jamieson's opinion that the police had been generous in not prosecuting some cases involving underage students<sup>116</sup>. This was echoed by a session

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<sup>112</sup> Letter to the Editor, *MES*, 28 April 1966. The loan referred to was for a new hostel for Massey students - see Chapter Two for further details.

<sup>113</sup> *Chaff*, Volume XIX, Number 14, May 1968, p.12

<sup>114</sup> At this time, the lower age limit for drinking in hotels was twenty one years old.

<sup>115</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>116</sup> *MES*, 7 April 1967. The report referred to confusion over some barmen claiming that the police had warned them that they would be penalised if they served students. Inspector Jamieson said 'If they are over 21 we cannot touch them' but added 'maybe not serving students is the best way, as it is very hard to tell if they are over 21.'

magistrate in 1968, who addressed the student appearing before him on charges of stealing traffic signs:

“Sometimes you people do things for sheer fun on the occasion of capping,” Mr Horn said. But [he] warned, what the defendant had to realise was the situation the Court would be put in if a non-student appeared on a similar charge. “What I am suggesting to you and I hope you will pass the word around, is that you make it very difficult for me to be lenient to students even on capping night.” Mr Horn dismissed the charge.<sup>117</sup>

The eighteen year old defendant was reported as saying that ‘older students had told us that on the night before the capping parade the police give us a fair go, and I thought nothing would be done about it.’<sup>118</sup> This indicates an appreciable level of licence given by police, and assumed by students, that students were somehow ‘special cases’ when it came to lawbreaking, particularly at capping time. It also brings into focus the preceding letter to the editor, and the correspondent’s attitude to students’ public misbehaviour. In both cases it is interesting that students are not deemed to be fully responsible for their actions, requiring the imposition of external controls or regulations. Mention of the city’s loan for a new hostel may be considered as another form of external control, whereby the limits of public acceptance were defined by threatening to withdraw financial help as well as tolerance if they were exceeded.<sup>119</sup>

### **The Community Chest**

While some aspects of student capping events were subject to complaints the annual charity collection, which MUSA ran concurrently with Procesh, was widely perceived as mutually beneficial. Students perceived it as an opportunity to ‘give something back’ to the wider community, at the same time as storing up goodwill with the public against the anticipated excesses of capping week.

In this decade, the charity collection became a point of contention between the PNCC and MUSA, and provides an interesting view of interactions and attitudes between both groups. The collection was a traditional feature of Procesh, but the establishment of a Community Chest in 1954 led to disagreement about the collection’s intended recipients.

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<sup>117</sup> *MES*, 30 April 1968

<sup>118</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> The city’s loan for hostel accommodation is summarized in Chapter Two.

The rationale behind the Community Chest was that city residents would be asked to give only to it instead of to numerous street collections throughout the year. In practice, it was an inefficient and overly bureaucratic collector and disbursing of funds, failing to incorporate major charities and providing inadequately for smaller ones.<sup>120</sup> From its inception, Massey student representatives had argued that they preferred to collect for charity of their choice, as giving the entire collection to one group allowed them to completely fund a project. Their objections to the Chest continued throughout the decade of this study, as MUSA challenged the authority of the Chest and the PNCC to decide for them. This led to threats within the PNCC to ban Procesh completely, and raised issues of intergenerational difference and organizational conflict. After years of grudgingly complying with the Chest's conditions, MUSA decided, in 1966, 'after considerable inquiry into relative needs...that we would go outside the Community Chest, in fact, outside the country – as is often done by other universities – and collect for the Save the Children Fund.' The writer went on to describe the direct action strategies of SCF, before focusing on the 'town-gown' implications of their decision:

Because this year is a complete break from tradition and an extension of Massey's rights, we must ensure that this year's collection is a bumper one. We intend to collect an unprecedented £1000 and show the public that we are worthy of the freedom we claim.<sup>121</sup>

The PNCC, described in another *Chaff* article as 'bewildered' by MUSA's request, acquiesced, but indicated its expectation that succeeding collections would return to the Community Chest.<sup>122</sup> By 1968 the issue had grown in intensity, and erupted after a PNCC council meeting voted 7-6 in favour of the Community Chest claiming 20% of each student collection. (MUSA's alternative was to donate the entire collection to the Community Chest once in every five years.) Letters to the editor almost unanimously supported the students' stand against this restriction, with correspondents condemning both the administration costs of the trust and the Council's heavy-handed approach. In a letter indicative of these, 'Turning Worm' wrote

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<sup>120</sup> A Community Chest Review Committee, convened in 1968, outlined the problems facing the Chest, including disaffection of smaller members, inability to evolve to meet changing needs and adverse publicity, partly as a result of the ongoing disagreement with MUSA. The committee recommended that the Chest be wound up. The PNCC and Chest trustees rejected this recommendation. Submissions to Community Chest Review Committee, 11 November; 19 November; 27 November 1968. Report of the Community Chest Review Committee, 1969

<sup>121</sup> *Chaff*, Volume XVII, Number 5, March 1966

<sup>122</sup> *Chaff*, Volume XVII, Number 6, April 1966

I feel so strongly about this that on Capping Day I do not intend giving to the Community Chest but instead will give a donation to the St. John ambulance. I am with the Massey students all the way. They do a great job and should be allowed a free hand.<sup>123</sup>

It is tempting to consider this simply as a generational dispute, based on youth challenging middle-aged 'establishment'. Students were asserting their rights to greater autonomy in other directions: a similar push for stronger student voices and autonomy at University level resulted in the appointment of student representatives to the University Council in 1969. Yet The Community Chest issue showed wider interrelationships between students and city factions. The apparent level of support from within Council (evidenced by the close vote, and the Deputy Mayor's promotion of the MUSA alternative)<sup>124</sup>, combined with popular support from Palmerston North residents suggests that these groups shared a commitment to the charity collection as an integral part of Proceash, and expressed overt support for students in this role.<sup>125</sup> The 'special' status of students as collectors, not subject to the rules of other Community Chest members, underlay this.

A large part of MUSA's argument over the Community Chest was its right to autonomy over the collection, but elements of the Council and Community Chest administrators' views on dealing with MUSA also provoked a strong response from the Capping Controller. Reacting to opinions about the annual turnover of student executives and consequent inability to rely on long-term decisions taken by them, J. C. Vernon wrote

Students of the university are disturbed that an elected executive of an organisation of the Community Chest's standing could display such open distrust. We regard these two points as a slur on the integrity of Massey University students, and an indication that the Chest holds serious misgivings as to the trustworthiness of the executive and capping committees of the future.<sup>126</sup>

Placed beside the acknowledged value of the students' collection - and contribution to the community - by other members of the city's population, this letter highlights the complexity of the 'town-gown' relationship. The uneasy relationship between the Community Chest and MUSA continued throughout the decade, although representatives

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<sup>123</sup> *MES*, 4 April 1968. MUSA intended to raise enough for a caravan for St. John Ambulance, although by the time 20% of the collection was deducted there was not enough for the purchase.

<sup>124</sup> *MES*, 25 March 1968

<sup>125</sup> Local businesses sponsored full-page advertisements in the *Manawatu Evening Standard* that appeared the day before Proceash, reminding residents of the collection, and urging their support throughout the 1960s.

<sup>126</sup> *MES*, 1 April 1968



of each group continued to meet and negotiate. In 1970 MUSA sought and gained permission to collect for one charity, on the condition that further collections be split 50-50 with the Chest.<sup>127</sup> In 1973, it responded to funding requests from two organisations for 50% of the funds and proposed to assist four other groups within the Community Chest with the other 50%.<sup>128</sup> Correspondence to and from local charities represented a notable feature of Capping Committee minutes throughout the period, and the level of engagement with these organisations, the PNCC, and Community Chest administrators suggests an awareness of community activity by MUSA that belied students' self-indulgent stereotype.

Other students tested the tolerance of Palmerston North's civic authorities and residents throughout the decade, often acting outside of the mediated boundaries negotiated for them by MUSA. When disgruntled citizens wrote letters to the editor about the antics - and character - of students during capping week, it was often to highlight concern about a perceived lack of controls on their behaviour. In a letter complaining about Procesh 'A.G.B.' questioned the university management's role in maintaining standards, quoting from J. Edgar Hoover to make his point:

"Common decency is battling for its life." Are our wives, daughters and children going to be subjected to this sort of thing under the guise of academic freedom, or for the benefit of charity?

Sir, those who direct our university must be aware that we cannot live with lawlessness, unbridled vulgarity, obscenity, blasphemy, perversion and public desecration of every sacred and just symbol...Are not these parades supposed to be censored?<sup>129</sup>

The letter concluded by indicating that the writer had not had 'the opportunity of university education'. It is interesting to note that many letters of this kind referred to the privilege of university education, equating it with the expectation of higher moral standards, and students' perceived lack of appreciation for their position.

The Vice Chancellor, Dr. Alan Stewart, received a number of letters each year about student behaviour, some bemoaning the university's apparent inability or lack of intent to

<sup>127</sup> *MES*, 24 March 1970. Councillor Kear suggested that the 17-year deadlock had been the result of the 'hard and fast stand taken on either side', prompting the President of the Community Chest to concede that it was, perhaps, time to re-assess the rules governing collections. Although the Chest administrators considered MUSA's agreement a resolution, later reports throughout the 1970s suggest that this was overly optimistic. The Community Chest was finally wound up in 1982.

<sup>128</sup> Capping Committee minutes, 20 March 1973

<sup>129</sup> *MES*, 30 April 1968

impose disciplinary measures on recalcitrant students. These he promptly forwarded to MUSA for action, noting in his sympathetic replies to the aggrieved citizens that MUSA was responsible for organizing and policing student capping events.<sup>130</sup> Massey University authorities never banned Procesh, as had happened at other universities, which may indicate a level of validation for the event itself, however it worked in practice. Similarly, it did not seem to be common practice for the university to discipline students over Procesh or capping stunts, although misdemeanours were referred to the Professorial Board for discussion.<sup>131</sup> Letters sometimes requested payment of dry-cleaning bills after bystanders were the unwitting recipients of substances thrown from floats. These were generally paid without argument by MUSA, acknowledging the likelihood of such events and the need to present a responsible public face. Smith refers to a similar situation at Victoria, noting that such costs were figured into the capping budget: 'it was one way of buying a measure of public tolerance for Procesh.'<sup>132</sup>

Flour, water and other less innocuous substances were thrown from floats at Procesh's audience, and sometimes they threw things back. Boundaries between participants and audience were thus blurred, indicating a willingness to engage with Procesh at some level. Engagement was always ambiguous however, depending upon the motives of participants in targeting each other. Press reports of numbers of citizens who stopped what they were doing, or consciously arranged to be present in order to watch Procesh, range from hundreds to thousands.<sup>133</sup> The same reports indicate an aware public, who had some idea of what to expect and who were discerning in their judgements of the parade's quality. Floats in the 1970 Procesh targeted an outspoken church leader (and critic of 1969's *Masskerade*)<sup>134</sup> and lampooned Easter with a mock crucifixion. This points to an element of wilful provocation by some students, who consciously targeted Father Duffy because of his earlier stand against the capping magazine. Although newspaper coverage of the 1970

<sup>130</sup> Vice Chancellor's Correspondence files, 1963-1973, (Massey University archives) contain letters of this nature every year.

<sup>131</sup> The notable exception to this was the referral, by the university's Professorial Board, of the 1969 issue of *Masskerade* to the Indecent Publications Tribunal.

<sup>132</sup> Smith, p.162

<sup>133</sup> Informal conversations with people who saw Procesh in this period often indicated that city workers arranged their breaks to coincide with Procesh's appearance in the city centre. *Manawatu Times*, 2 April 1963; *Dominion*, 27 April 1965; *MES*, 24 April 1968

<sup>134</sup> Father Duffy had been an outspoken, and highly publicized, critic of the 1969 issue of *Masskerade*, calling it blasphemous and highly disrespectful of moral and Christian values.

parade reported that 'the crowd lining the footpaths appeared to take no exception to any of the floats',<sup>135</sup> by 1972 Christians were encouraged to actively 'obstruct "religious parody" floats, tear down obscenities and use non-violent protest to obstruct any part of the Massey capping parade which is an offence to any religion.'<sup>136</sup> The level of intransigence on each side appeared to escalate, as deliberately provocative actions were taken. The intent was no longer perceived by either group as to 'amuse all and offend none'.

In 1968, 'Liberal Housewife' wrote, in a letter to the editor, about the need for public tolerance during capping week:

This is now a university city, come what may. I would like to see some greater evidence of this fact than has been displayed during the past week. On several occasions during one week of the year, good nature, indulgence (albeit without levity), and generosity are called for to enable students, and all who wish to, to celebrate the entrance of some of them into full adult life and responsibility.<sup>137</sup>

The letter goes on to chide the city authorities and police for their negativity towards students trying to promote a 'carnival atmosphere', arguing that 'inhibiting do's and don'ts, even control of the purse, take the spice from the occasion for both student and public in general.' Her positive attitude to the symbolic inversion of Procesh, and disapproval of ever-tighter controls on it, were a counterpoint to perennial letters of disapproval of students and Procesh.

Although many residents tacitly accepted the event's disruption, and some openly supported the students in their festival mode, the actuality of Procesh could be hard to endure. As Smith dryly observed, 'ritual reversal is more attractive when considered in the abstract than when it is marching down your street and liberally dusting you with water and perhaps more unpleasant substances.'<sup>138</sup> With the advent of an organised 'pub crawl' after Procesh in 1971,<sup>139</sup> students became more visible in their continued flouting of acceptable social standards (in the form of drunkenness and disorder, especially during the day) which spread out from the city centre after Procesh had finished. Where Procesh

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<sup>135</sup> *MES*, 9 April 1970

<sup>136</sup> *MES*, 8 April 1972

<sup>137</sup> *MES*, 26 April 1968

<sup>138</sup> Smith, p.187

<sup>139</sup> Although the first 'Tour de Taverns' was incorporated into the capping programme in 1971, students had been involved in drinking at local hotels after Procesh for many years. (Capping Committee minutes, 23 April 1971)

at least aimed at entertaining the public on some level, the subsequent self-centred 'pub crawls' merely proved an irritant.<sup>140</sup>

By 1971 MUSA reports were lamenting the level of organisation necessary to run *Procesh* to the city authorities' dictates, stating that 'every year capping week seems to become a larger scale business operation and seems less fun for the participants'<sup>141</sup>. Fun was less innocent, and less easily achieved. Although the 1973 Student President, Alan Carrick, said that 'Massey students were fortunate to have such good relations with the authorities, particularly the police, over capping', they came at the cost of increasingly stringent conditions imposed on *Procesh*. These external restrictions on *Procesh*, and internal changes in student values and the university's timetable worked to further weaken student attachment to capping events.<sup>142</sup> The same 1971 MUSA report refers to the partial supplanting of capping by an extensive Orientation programme, and 'the reluctance of students to have two periods of academic disaster in the first term is reinforced by their financial inability to do so due to delayed bursary payments.'<sup>143</sup> The 'new evil [of] first term term tests' was also indicated as a disincentive to spend time building floats and organising stunts.<sup>144</sup> In addition, capping committees were faced with a high level of general student apathy (worthy of mention in every President's annual report for the decade), and dissent over the appropriateness of much of *Procesh*'s 'traditional' content.<sup>145</sup> Student politicians were becoming more focused on serious political issues: a Special General Meeting of MUSA in 1971 debated issues like Women's Liberation, abortion, compulsory attendance at secondary school – and whether capping should be abolished. At other New Zealand universities, too, changes in the student body were reflected in wavering commitment to retaining student capping events. Victoria

<sup>140</sup> Sharfe notes a similar public antipathy towards some Auckland students city pub crawls: 'For onlookers these activities lacked the visual appeal of student processions and the good-humoured attempts at communication.' She also mentions the unpopularity of student political protests, that lacked the humour of capping events. p.87

<sup>141</sup> MUSA Annual Report, 1971.

<sup>142</sup> *MES*, 26 April 1973. Restrictions included prohibitions on offensive wording, throwing of flour, eggs 'or other items' and an itinerary of the 'pub crawl' being available to police in advance of *Procesh*.

<sup>143</sup> MUSA Annual Report, 1971

<sup>144</sup> *ibid.* Although terms tests were not new, their incorporation into the earlier part of the year was seen as significant in changing students' patterns of work and play. The Vice-Chancellor, Dr Stewart, contended that increased internal assessment, brought in at the request of students, changed students' working patterns – and leisure activities. (Sir Alan Stewart, Interview Number SAM 26, Side 6)

<sup>145</sup> Perceptions of student apathy have remained a constant refrain of student politicians and *Chaff* editorials to the current day.

University's student Executive dispensed with Procesh in 1971<sup>146</sup>, as did Auckland University's Student Association. In his Auckland University history, Keith Sinclair considers that

A principal, perhaps main, influence on this decision was not 'civic' disapproval, but the fact that the interest of students in horse-play and the obscenities of 'capping mags' was fading. This point deserves some emphasis, for the attitudes of the young were in a phase of rapid change.<sup>147</sup>

Canterbury University student politicians sought to appease anti-capping students by removing the more offensive public elements of capping. Although this was very unpopular with 'traditional' capping supporters, successive Executives reiterated the decision until 1976, when it was overturned. In the space of a few years, however, the link in the student cycle had been broken.<sup>148</sup> The universities that maintained the tradition of Procesh the longest were Otago and Massey, which were both perceived as being in communities more sympathetic to student culture than those in larger centres.<sup>149</sup> In both cases, the eventual disintegration of student capping events resulted as much from lack of student interest and alienation from capping as from external pressures from city authorities.<sup>150</sup> The excesses of capping became as much of an embarrassment to some students as they were to some city residents. Massey students continued with Procesh until 1987, although by the time that it was cancelled, it had lost much of its earlier vigour and entertainment value.<sup>151</sup>

Procesh required the motivation of students to plan the event, negotiate its parameters, build floats, collect for charity and enthusiastically present it as a representation of student culture (or subcultures). Procesh also required Palmerston North's civic authorities and citizens to at least accommodate, and hopefully embrace, the disruption that such a symbolic inversion represented. The event was predicated on city residents

<sup>146</sup> Smith, p.257, notes an internal division among Victoria students: 'Conservative students wanted Procesh; the more left-wing and liberal ones, the reds, pinks and pale purples, were anti-Procesh'

<sup>147</sup> Sinclair, p.260 He adds that the Auckland University Student Association supported the University Council's promotion of an academic procession to replace it, initially against staff wishes.

<sup>148</sup> Jean Sharfe, *Players, Protestors and Politicians: A History of the University Of Canterbury Students' Association*, Christchurch: Clerestory Press, 1995, p.123.

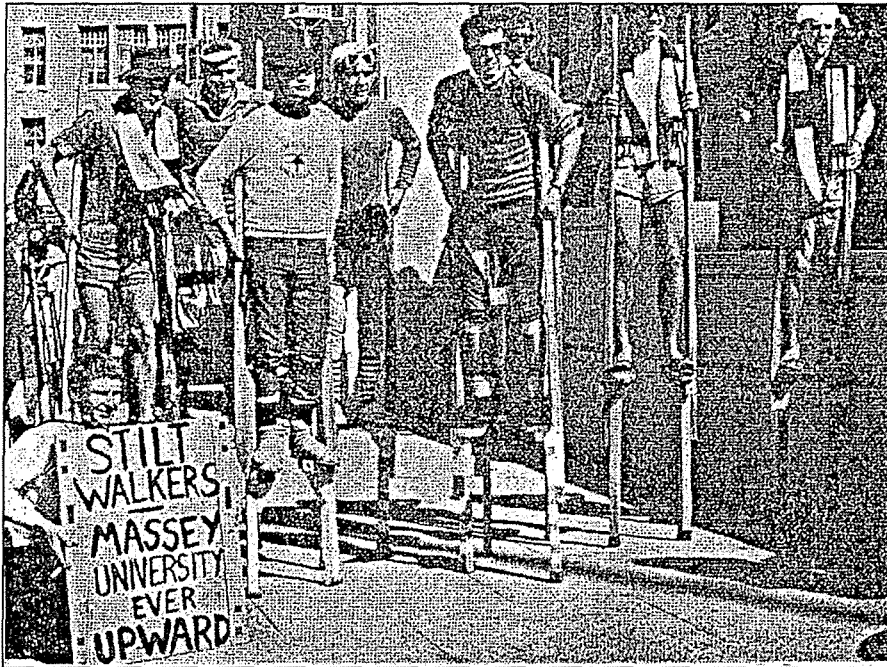
<sup>149</sup> The 'Town-Gown' chapter discusses perceptions of smaller or provincial centres as being more accepting of the universities within them.

<sup>150</sup> Elworthy, p.139, cites growing divisions between radicals and conservatives on campus and lack of student support as significant factors in the gradual decline of capping at Otago.

<sup>151</sup> The President's Report in the 1987 MUSA Annual Report expresses some astonishment that the PNCC should effectively end Procesh, 'in a city where the university is the biggest industry'.

granting Massey students licence to behave outside of otherwise acceptable norms, and on students understanding the extreme limits of that licence. During this decade, both of these groups experienced changes in their own values, and in their attitudes to the other, and the licence granted or seized was more openly contested. Relationships were complex and fluid throughout this time, and no single representation of 'town' or 'gown' was able to incorporate the range of reactions to each other.

## CHAPTER FOUR: CLEVER HOAXES AND CRIMINAL ESCAPADES<sup>152</sup>. STUNTS 1963-1973



*Sir Francis Kitts, Mayor of Wellington, farewelled these Massey students on their stilt marathon to Palmerston North. The students received official co-operation and public support, as well as publicity for Masskerade, on these inter-city journeys.*

©Dominion, 31 March 1967

Over the decade, Massey students delivered capping week messages from the Mayor of Wellington to his counterpart in Palmerston North by a number of novel means. Some students managed it by walking backwards, others waltzed (suitably formally dressed), and various wheeled vehicles - from tricycles to chariots - conveyed other travellers. In 1973, capping week was launched by a group of students towing a keg of beer from the capital. One press report noted that '[it] is expected to arrive in the city by Friday night, but not necessarily full.'<sup>153</sup> Such public displays of youthful energy, ingenuity and humour were one consistent face of capping stunts in this period. They were widely recognized as a 'traditional' part of capping week: harmless, student-centred and even beneficial when

<sup>152</sup> The title refers to two headlines reporting the 'taking' of an army truck: 'Took truck as capping escapade', *Dominion*, 4 May 1965 and 'Action nothing short of criminal', *MES*, 3 May 1965; and another referring to a fictitious survey of wildfowl, 'Official letters were a clever hoax', *Tribune*, 25 April 1965

<sup>153</sup> *Guardian*, 28 March 1973

combined with charitable collections en route.<sup>154</sup> Other stunts or hoaxes turned their focus outward, towards Palmerston North's residents. Many of these 'exoteric' stunts invited public reaction, as features of city landmarks were altered overnight, without directly targeting individuals or groups. In other more controversial stunts students planned hoaxes intended to inconvenience or embarrass institutions or individuals. This chapter will show some of the stunts undertaken by Massey students, and the reactions they elicited from an often discerning and generally tolerant city population. The interactions between MUSA and civic officials, and MUSA and student hoaxers will also be examined, to determine changes over time.



*This group of 'bikies', pedalling in shifts, delivered the traditional mayoral message from Wellington to Palmerston North in 1969.*

©Dominion, 12 April 1969

The 1965 Stunts Controller, Roger O'Dwyer, drumming up enthusiasm for students' stunt planning in *Chaff*, considered that

The purpose of stunts prior to and during Capping is two-fold. Firstly it is another method of all-important publicity and secondly is a means for students to let off a bit of steam, more or less with the sanction of the authorities.<sup>155</sup>

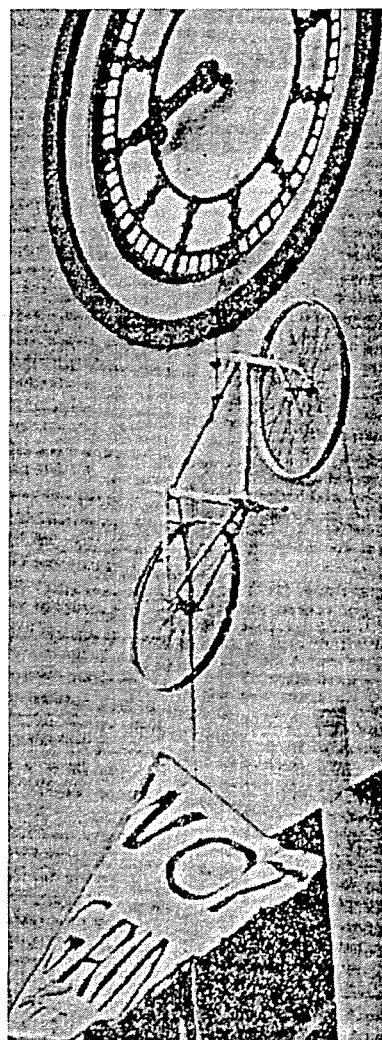
<sup>154</sup> Local press coverage of these annual 'journeys' was generous, with photographs, sometimes taken with the Mayors of Palmerston North or Wellington, to supplement written text.

<sup>155</sup> *Chaff*, Volume XVI, Number 5, March 1965, p.6



The first of these points is significant in terms of gaining maximum public exposure for capping in general, and for *Masskerade* sales in particular. Masskerade sales subsidised all other capping events, from the Capping Revue to the Graduation Ball, so publicly announcing its availability by the free advertising that came with effective stunts made good economic sense for MUSA. The second point contains a number of elements that indicate something of the relationship between students and the city at capping time. Stunts provided students with not just a safety valve for youthful high spirits, but also an outlet for creative and ingenious trickery. The level of planning that went into some stunts indicated an intellectual engagement with the processes of 'pulling off' a successful stunt, as much as the glee derived from fooling or baffling the public. While some capping week behaviour caused residents to lament students' apparent lack of wit or intelligence, clever stunts could elicit favourable responses from the public. A 1968 letter to the editor, remarking on the nocturnal positioning of twenty eight bicycles on flagpoles all round the city, praised students for 'one of the few stunts to gain applause from the whole city...Now, surely, every Palmerstonian anxiously awaits to hear...how in the world it was accomplished.'<sup>156</sup> A similar amused bafflement greeted the appearance of a nappy on the landmark 'revolving kiwi' that topped the PDC department store in 1972.<sup>157</sup>

All of these features, and their physical manifestations, were dependent upon the sanction of Palmerston North residents and city authorities. A considerable level of official tolerance towards stunts was evident throughout



<sup>156</sup> *MES*, 3 April 1968. This letter was written after the initial placement of one bicycle on the Clocktower in the Square. Over capping week, progressively more suspended bicycles appeared.

<sup>157</sup> Capping Committee minutes, 11 April 1972

the decade although, as with Proceh, this became subject to closer scrutiny and more controls as students pushed at the limits of acceptability. The 'bikes on flagpoles' stunt of 1968 invited police investigation, with 'a number of students questioned'. Inspector Jamieson pointed out that it was 'an offence to climb buildings without the permission of the owners' and that 'prosecutions were possible.'<sup>158</sup> His official disapproval, no doubt bolstered by the Police Office's own flagpole being 'decorated', was not translated into prosecutions, perhaps indicating some leeway given to students. Anonymity was also a significant feature of stunts like these where legality was questionable, as it protected the perpetrators from police prosecution. All stunts were, however, subject to prior approval by the Capping Committee. Successive committees reiterated this, in similar fashion to the 1966 Stunts Controller:

I must stress that ALL stunts MUST be put before Stunts Committee, if this is not done we may anger the constabulary beyond patience. If we approve we can give financial or other aid, and if we don't you may be sure that no one else will approve either, and we can't afford bad publicity.<sup>159</sup>

The previous year, a stunt that 'borrowed' an army truck from Linton Camp, decorated it with painted slogans and left it in the central city, provoked strong reaction from city officials and police. The three students involved indicated that they had Capping Committee approval for the stunt, aimed at testing army security.<sup>160</sup> The following day, the students and their lawyer gave voluntary statements to the police about the stunt. Press coverage of the resulting court appearance highlighted the irresponsibility of the students, and of MUSA's failure to deter a criminal act. The presiding magistrate noted previous occasions when he had to deal with student stunts that 'collided' with the law: "On such occasions I have been asked to extend the sort of leniency that you have asked for, but this is quite the worst act of this type that I have ever had to deal with.' He did not convict the students, noting the lack of criminal intent, saying that to do so would have serious consequences for their later professional lives. Even while condemning their actions, he still treated them as extraordinary.<sup>161</sup> The clear overextension of licence was

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<sup>158</sup> *MES*, 23 April 1968

<sup>159</sup> *Chaff*, Volume XVII, Number 3, February 1966, p.8

<sup>160</sup> The students involved stated their concern at the New Zealand Army's unpreparedness for a guerilla invasion. A *Chaff* article entitled 'God Defend New Zealand (The Army Can't)', asserted that 'when the Commos come, and they will, laws won't protect the army. Strength and preparedness will.' *Chaff*, Volume XVI, Number 6, April 1965

<sup>161</sup> *MES*, 3 May 1965; *Dominion*, 4 May 1965

reinforced in an editorial that challenged student assumptions of exemption from legal consequences:

It is this aspect of the escapade that is the most reprehensible. Because, apparently, the taking of the lorry was carried out in the full knowledge that it was unlawful, but with some mistaken idea [that the perpetrators] would either not get caught or would not be charged if they were caught. This belief seems to have been common to not only the accused students but also to the [Capping Committee] which had approved...the stunt. The incredible thing is that a body of intelligent young men could have been so ignorant and irresponsible...This is a pretty poor example for other young people from young men to whom the community looks to provide the leaders of the future.<sup>162</sup>

The editorial concluded with the observation that the 'ill-conceived' stunt 'will have done tremendous harm to the image of the student body.' Although publicly repentant, the students involved castigated MUSA in *Chaff* for its perceived obsequiousness to city authorities at the expense of students who perceived themselves as distinct from townspeople:

Exec. has always been noted for a subservient attitude towards the city council. Perhaps this has been worthwhile in avoiding strife with the authorities, but the cost has been high in stunted imaginations. Public opinion is the behaviour of the little man. I hope it never rules the students.<sup>163</sup>

This episode illustrates MUSA's often uncomfortable position between 'town' and 'gown', as it tried to accommodate its student members without alienating the city population. The need to contain student actions within negotiated parameters of 'good taste' or acceptability was sometimes explicitly related to financial benefits to MUSA from civic authorities, as in this MUSA President's report from the following year:

This year a careful eye was kept on stunts as Public Opinion had to be carefully kept pro-Massey for the £90,000 Hostels donations. Anyone who criticised this policy needs their head read. While I most certainly believe in the freedom of speech and action etc., anyone trying to offend the City's population under such circumstances would have been ridiculous and most ungrateful.<sup>164</sup>

Targeting a New Zealand institution, as in the 'army truck' stunt, exceeded limits of official tolerance, while stunts targeting private citizens provoked less outcry despite being more inconvenient to a larger group of private citizens. Another stunt carried out in 1965 was aimed at residents of an affluent suburb bordering 'the lagoon'.<sup>165</sup> They received letters, ostensibly from the Health Department, asking for their cooperation in completing a survey aimed at determining the extent of salmonella in the area's wildfowl. Also included were sample containers for pet bird droppings and human urine, to be

<sup>162</sup> *The Tribune*, 9 May 1965

<sup>163</sup> *Chaff*, Volume XVI, Number 6, April 1965

<sup>164</sup> President's Report, MUSA Annual Report, 1966

<sup>165</sup> The lagoon is an ornamental lake in Hokowhitu, a Palmerston North suburb.

forwarded to the Health Department. Despite a quick response from Department officials, 'a number of samples' were received.<sup>166</sup> The success of this stunt lay in its planning. The letter, although containing a number of clues to its falsity, looked sufficiently official and contained enough technical information to fool some people. One of the participants recalled:

I was involved with some of my friends in this...All [of] the materials were as authentic as possible...and a mailing envelope, a waterproof mailing envelope was – maybe it was a plastic bag. The ultimate downfall of the stunt was that the envelopes burst in the mail [laughter].

And so the first inkling we had that things were going wrong was when the Post Office clicked onto the fact that this was a Massey students' stunt. And so there were some red hot calls to cease and desist. And then the Health Department of course got involved, and there was accusations of forgery, and people were going to be charged...Nothing ever came of it, but there was a lot of scurrying to clean up, in more ways than one...<sup>167</sup>

Press reports pointed out that it was a crime to send 'offensive matter' through the mail, and that police inquiries were underway, but acknowledged that this was 'a clever hoax'.<sup>168</sup> A further measure of success for this stunt was the extent to which it became part of the narrative of student culture. Smith notes several references to it from Victoria students, and other stunts in the same vein followed over the next decade.<sup>169</sup>

Buoyed by previous success, a similar stunt was attempted in 1967. This stunt requested that householders dip spatulas dyed at one end into urine samples, to test for 'diabetes intermittens', and return them together with a survey form to the Health Department. Discerning recipients noted that the New Zealand coat of arms on the letterhead contained some discrepancies, as the Maori chieftain wore a watch, and the Massey capping week symbol replaced one of the three ships.<sup>170</sup> Once again, the Health Department publicized the hoax, but still received completed survey forms.

A similar 'official' letter drop to West End residents in 1973, purporting to be from the PNCC, advised residents that their properties could be required for the path of a new bridge over the Manawatu River. Most people recognised it as a hoax, but 'several elderly [people] were concerned [and] one elderly woman collapsed' upon reading the circular.<sup>171</sup> The City Engineer was reported as saying that 'it will have cost a few dollars to print and

<sup>166</sup> *MES*, 17 April 1965

<sup>167</sup> Interview with Tony Rimmer, student at Massey 1960-1965, Smith, p.212

<sup>168</sup> *Tribune*, 25 April 1965; *MES*, 17 April 1965

<sup>169</sup> Smith, p.217

<sup>170</sup> *MES*, 3 April 1967

<sup>171</sup> *MES*, 7 April 1973

distribute and I hope the cost will not have been debited from the students' annual contribution to charity.'<sup>172</sup> The press coverage of distressed pensioners and distrustful city officials may indicate a shift in editorial attitudes to capping stunts since the 1960s stunts, with less tacit acceptance of students' right to 'have a laugh' at the expense of residents. It is also possible that this reaction resulted from the more extreme nature of stunts, in this case targeting people's personal connections with their homes.

The Capping Controller's report for 1971 notes a perceived coolness from Palmerstonians to student stunts – 'it appears that only organised but original stunts will capture the imagination of the rather insensitive, student resistant crowd over "the



Bridge". Their imagination was not captured by a stunt that year, in which a truck dumped boxes over one side of the road leading onto the bridge at morning traffic time. The resulting traffic blockage led to accusations of gross irresponsibility, and the Chief Traffic Officer's call for Procesh to be banned. Delicate negotiations between the Capping Committee and the Mayor were described in minutes as 'a fraction frigid

*Stunts that not only inconvenienced the public, but also provided a safety hazard to traffic, were particularly frowned upon by city authorities, which reacted by imposing tighter restrictions on capping activities.*

©Manawatu Evening Standard, 8 April 1971

<sup>172</sup> *ibid.*

initially', but Procesh was allowed to proceed.<sup>173</sup> This reinforces the idea that, at times of particular tension between students and city officials, the underlying goodwill built up between the university and city supported the process of compromising to reach some mutually liveable accommodation. The price of accommodation, for MUSA and its members, was stricter controls and a contraction of licence for other aspects of capping.<sup>174</sup>

Over the decade, there is evidence of a change in the motivation behind stunts. Events that were entertaining for students and the public, like a handshaking world record in 1963 or a gangster-style bank robbery (by prior arrangement with the manager) in 1965, became interspersed with less acceptable representations of student culture. 1969 Capping Committee minutes sanction drinking a pub dry and mention, as a proposed stunt, a house-wrecking party.<sup>175</sup> Such events required little wit, entertained few and prompted another flurry of letters to the editor on the moral turpitude of students. Clever stunts that required time and planning became less evident, reflecting similar changes in the composition and execution of Procesh, and were symptomatic of a decline in student engagement with the concept of stunts as a form of entertainment and effective publicity for capping week.

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<sup>173</sup> Capping Committee minutes, 16 April 1971

<sup>174</sup> Restrictions on Procesh are noted in Chapter Three.

<sup>175</sup> Capping Committee minutes, 16 March 1969. While it is not recorded whether the house-wrecking stunt was officially approved, there were letters to the editor from landlords condemning such destructive and thoughtless actions. As flatting in Palmerston North became a significant accommodation preference for students, friction between tenants and landlords increased, and lasted throughout the year.

## CONCLUSION:

Researching student-generated capping events provides many opportunities to appreciate these public exhibitions of humour, wit and sheer effrontery all over again. Students who chose to participate in capping events, in this period as in others, did so because it reinforced how they saw themselves as students – and because it was fun. The balancing act was always how much fun could be had within negotiated limits, and how far those limits could be stretched. Within the decade of this study, students' sense of what constituted 'fun' was increasingly open to contestation by city residents and officials and, significantly, by other students.

Capping activities were barometers of the town-gown relationship. In this decade, there was a considerable amount of change to both town and gown, yet there were also some constants to the relationship. Massey University underwent considerable change in its student and staff demographic, as it developed from an agricultural college to a full university. Its physical environment was dramatically altered to accommodate this development, providing concrete evidence of the metamorphosis within. Less tangible, but no less important, was change within the student body, in terms of composition and developments of youth culture and student subcultures. These changes were, in turn, part of a larger shift in societal attitudes from the later 1960s on, and Palmerston North residents' acceptance or rejection of them. The faces that Massey students presented to Palmerston North altered throughout the decade, as did the faces that Palmerstonians expected to see. Letters to the editor by pro- and anti-student correspondents show varying degrees of acceptance of student culture, from the accommodation of 'this is now a university city, come what may' to the moral indignation of 'common decency is fighting for its life.'<sup>176</sup> The increasing quantity of Massey students, and their visibility as students, forced Palmerstonians to come to terms with them as a presence in the city.

Massey University's decade of development brought change to the city too. Broad areas of Massey's influence included substantial economic benefits from capital works and increased spending in the city, social and infrastructural implications of increased

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<sup>176</sup> Excerpts quoted in Chapter Three

numbers of students living in the city, and recognition by the PNCC, Massey University and MUSA of their economic interdependence. The goodwill fostered by these administrators and officials was an important factor at times of tension or friction between students and city residents. Constants, then, were also significant.

Students saw themselves as distinct from the rest of the city's population, and were granted, or claimed, privileges based upon the difference. This 'licence' to transgress or invert established societal norms was a key facet of the town-gown relationship, and the negotiated conditions attached to it indicated changes in the city's attitudes towards the disruption of capping week. While MUSA presented the responsible and community-minded face of Massey students to the city, its members did not always agree, or submit, to the conditions negotiated on their behalf. In contrast to the perceived homogeneity of earlier conservative male agricultural college students, Massey students in this decade developed subcultures of different interests and values that made MUSA's task of representing them more challenging.

How the planning for Procesh and stunts was achieved is significant, but so too is what students chose to present to Palmerston North. Much of the earlier content of Procesh and stunts was based on an assumption that they should be as entertaining for the audience as the participants. Considerable effort was put into achieving this. By the end of the decade, this does not appear to be the prime motivation behind either capping activity, with floats and stunts consciously targeting, rather than gently mocking, the city's population. The novelty of having a university attached to the city appears to have worn off for Palmerstonians, as they became less inclined to make exceptions for student behaviour, and students became less inclined to foster good relations with residents. Press reports and council officials became more overtly critical of student behaviour. In addition, students were less inclined to devote time or energy to planning or participating in capping activities, citing as reasons their increasing workload due to curriculum changes and a growing alienation by some students from traditional capping practices.

Capping in 2003 looks very different to that of 1963 or 1973. When Massey students participate in a procession around the Square, it is as gowned and capped graduates. The



formality of this occasion is completely at odds with the vulgarity and raucousness of Procesh, planned and executed by undergraduates. Stunts, too, have lost their place as an integral feature of capping week, appearing infrequently but still retaining their ability to surprise or baffle.

Raucous and often vulgar student capping events were, for much of Massey's history as agricultural college and university, a festive counterpoint to the consciously dignified ritual of graduation ceremonies. Their purpose was to celebrate what it meant to be a student – a Massey student - by mocking accepted bastions of university or civic life. Festival was a complement to ritual. Capping has now been taken over by the University, and presents an acceptable and respectable face to the city. As one has who has happily participated in this manifestation of university life and culture, I still feel a small sadness that its unofficial and irreverent counterpart is no longer available. Kevin Lowe, the Capping Controller for 1967, encapsulated the ethos of undergraduate capping events thus:

Taking part in Capping celebrations is the only real way of enjoying them, and if you leave Massey without featuring in Revue, building a float, selling a *Masskerade*, shaking a Collection tin or sailing a bath, then you have missed out on the most rewarding side of life as a student.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Massey University Orientation Handbook, 1967, p.20

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