

Tarleton State University's Purple Poo

Tarleton State University prides itself as having a rich history filled with unique traditions, including that of a still-secret organization whose mission is to raise the spirit of Tarleton.

The origins of the Purple Poo, arguably the oldest spirit organization in Texas, can be traced back to 1921 with the founding of the "Ten Tarleton Peppers," an all-male spirit group. Two years later, in 1923, an all-female companion group known as the "Ten Tarleton Sisters" appeared on campus. Although both groups were authorized campus organizations, the Peppers and Sisters had a fondness for secrecy. They held secret meetings, and at official events dressed in robes and disguised their identities.

Sometime in the mid-1960s, the Peppers and the Sisters became known collectively as the Purple Poo. The origins of the name are unclear, with some stories a bit more earthy than others. Was it pigs painted purple by students and let loose on campus? Or was it a student's reaction to a blob of purple paint dropped on the ground?

In any event, the moniker stuck and the Purple Poo became much more active and visible on campus, especially at pep rallies and athletic events. To this day, 20 members, who still keep their identities a secret, wear outlandish costumes, wigs, masks, hats and gloves. They speak in high squeaky voices.

At university events, the Poo try to raise the spirit of Oscar P—the legendary pet duck that is said to have traveled everywhere with John Tarleton, and which is said to be buried with the man who left his life savings to found John Tarleton College.

The Poo are said to meet secretly on Monday nights, spending most of the time creating signs. Initially painted on long sheets of canvas, these signs were stretched between trees on campus during the early morning hours each Tuesday to spark school spirit for upcoming athletic events.

Through the years the nature of the Purple Poo's popular signs has changed. Prefaced by the statement, "Poo Say," signs usually carry comical statements to boost spirit and energize students. Often the signs comment on campus life and politics.

While holding fast to tradition, the Purple Poo also created a few new rituals, including one during the Tarleton presidency of Dr. Barry B. Thompson, a former member of the Poo who later served as chancellor of the Texas A&M University System.

During Dr. Thompson's tenure, graduating members of the Purple Poo began slipping the president a small purple pig when shaking his hand on the commencement stage. The tradition continues.

Today, the Purple Poo veil of secrecy is interpreted as the Spirit of Tarleton—enduring and without a face, but with a heart and body dedicated to Tarleton and her highest ideals.

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