

# Purdue Tank Scrap

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## Introduction

The tradition of the Tank Scrap was an annual occurrence between 1894 and 1913 in which the freshman and sophomore classes at Purdue University fought over the rights to paint their class year on a water tank. Although starting out as a pure form of class pride, this tradition gradually became more violent into the early nineteen hundreds and eventually ending in a tragedy at Purdue.

In this often dangerous ritual, the two classes were pitted against each other as they fought for acknowledgement of class superiority. A Tank Scrap began with a claim of pride along with either the display of a class banner or the first inscription on the water tank nearby. Fighting between classes ensued and the victor was decided from the number of enemy captures along with which class's numbers ended up on the tank at the end of the night. The Tank Scraps continued to get more violent and rash as time moved along.

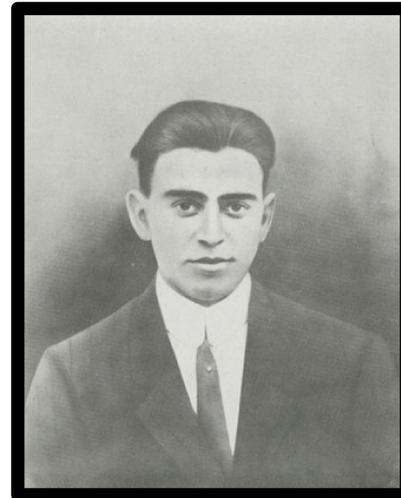


(Figure 1) The brutality during the heat of a typical scrap.

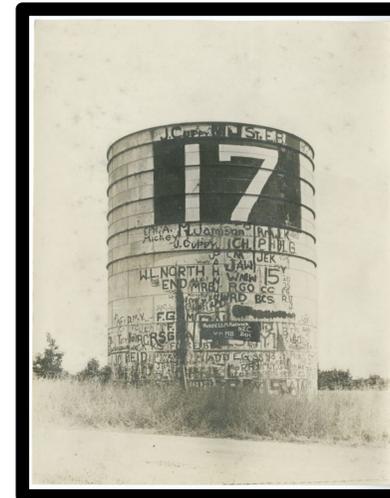
## Methods

Our report includes primary and secondary sources encompassing two methods: archival research and Internet exploration. The research for the Tank Scrap began in the Virginia Kelly Archives and Special Collections Research Center at Purdue University. Before conducting research, David Hovde, an archivist at Purdue, spoke to our research team about the archival exploration process. Due to the nature of archival investigation, the documents analyzed in the archives were primary sources. The main source from the archives used in the final report was the Simeon V.B. Miller Scrapbook, 1900-1906.

Because a limited number of primary sources were found in the archives, further research was conducted via the Internet. In doing so, our team found a digital version of the article "Tank Scrap is Won by Sophs" from the local newspaper *The Weekly Review* originally published in 1907. In order to further our understanding of the Tank Scrap, our group members expanded the research to include secondary sources. Although books were used in the investigation process, the most valuable information was derived from Purdue University's online archives: *Purdue Customs and Traditions*. Overall, the Internet exploration methods built upon the original methods of archival research.



(Figure 2) Francis Walter Obenchain



(Figure 3) An example of the Tank painted after a class victory..

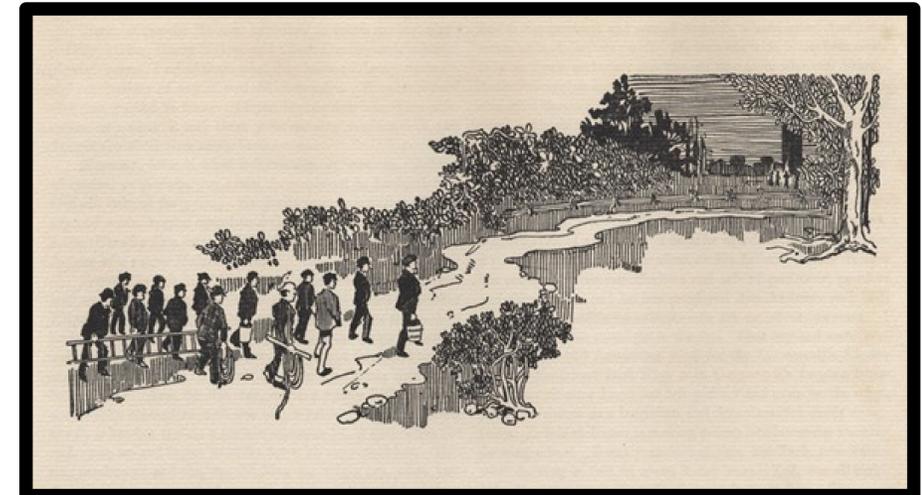
## Results

The violence from the tank scrap increased with every passing year. The tradition kept become bigger and bigger and the number and severity of injuries increased alongside. The press began to focus on the negatives and the Tank Scrap began to have a tainted name. The teachers and staff hated this tradition and did not want it to continue. The grievances started as mumbling quickly turned into outright protest and formal objections towards the Tank Scrap. Spectators and participants grew at an extraordinary rate from year to year, making a small tradition into a big event. In 1913, the Tank Scrap was still allowed to occur, but it was monitored closely and a new set of rules was strictly enforced. Purdue and its surrounding community disapproved of this tradition and hid the violent images and stories from the community newspapers. However, this 1913 Tank Scrap was the last and final year. The story surrounding the 1913 Tank Scrap is shrouded in mystery and lies. As the field cleared after the scrap, a Marshal found the body of Francis Walter Obenchain. The boy was pronounced dead, and while the coroner dismissed it as a heart injury to cover up the violence of the tank scrap, a later autopsy showed that he had died of a broken neck. This event showed the true violence of the Tank Scrap and led to a meeting of all the students, teachers, and faculty the next day in which a final decision was made. The Tank Scrap would no longer be a Purdue Tradition.

## Conclusion

The Tank Scrap is a significant part of Purdue's history. The Tank Scrap brought national attention to the campus and shed light on issues such as violence among college students based on their Class year. At the time, Purdue was not the only University who participated in events such as the Tank Scrap. Violence and pranking was a common occurrence between classes. Universities looked down football during this period upon as a violent sport because of all the injuries that resulted. Some universities removed football completely from their campus.

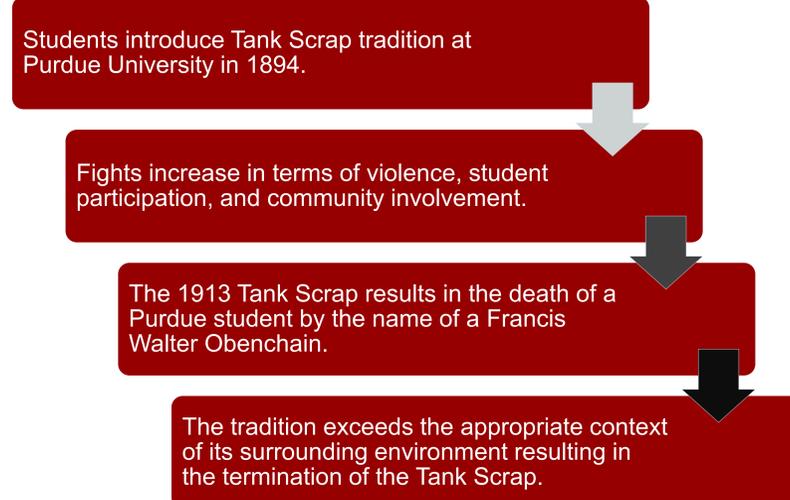
With the removal of these sports the men of these schools looked for other outlets to exert their pent up energy. The rebellious acts were a result of class pride, and the goal was to display dominance over the other classes. Many of these pranks turned into glorified traditions celebrated by future generations; however, many of these traditions became excessively violent and resulted in death.



(Figure 5) A group of people from the local community walk to the Tank Scrap.

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(Figure 4) A brief overview of the Purdue Tank Scrap from 1894 to 1913.