MYTHS and LEGENDS

HAVE YOU HEARD THE ONE ABOUT HARRIELSON HALL? READ ON TO SEPARATE FACT FROM FICTION.

by Caroline Barnhill ’05

1– Rubbing the head of the “strolling professor” statue near Burlington Nuclear Labs the night before your first chemistry test brings good luck. FACT. The statue is of William R. Johnson, who taught chemistry for 25 years and was often seen walking with his head in a book. We’re not going to argue with this one; chemistry students need all the help they can get.

2– NC State’s “Memorial Oak” tree, a gift by the first class of NC State, still stands. FICTION. The Memorial Oak, which is shown in the chancellor’s seal, was planted in 1890 by the first class of the North Carolina College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts in front of Holladay Hall. The tree contracted a fungal disease and had to be removed in 1990. Some wood from the tree was donated to Warmth for Wake, a relief organization, while other wood was used to make tables—including one that serves as the conference table in the chancellor’s office.

3– A monorail was planned to connect main campus to Centennial Campus. FACT. The monorail idea appeared in the university’s 2003 master plan. University officials have since reserved space in the campus infrastructure for what they are calling a “people mover.” Since monorails are a 1960s technology, they hope a newer technology will come along that they can use to connect main campus to Centennial Campus.

4– The “Block S” on the Brickyard was originally just an “S.” FACT. Former Chancellor Jim Oblinger requested an “S” be placed in the Brickyard in 2006 as part of an effort to elevate the prominence of the NC State brand. The initial “S” that went in did not include the “N” and “C,” prompting the chancellor to remark that “it looks like this is Stanford.” It was modified in short order.

5– The plaque inside the Memorial Bell Tower honoring alumni who died in World War I contains 35 names, even though only 34 perished in the war. FACT. George L. Jeffers, class of 1913, was wrongly reported killed in action, and his name was included by mistake. When the error was discovered, the university decided to alter the extra name. They made the “L” into an “E” and added “ON” to the last name, resulting in a fictitious “George E. Jefferson.”

6– David Thompson ’75 could jump so high that he could take a quarter off the top of the backboard and replace it with two dimes and a nickel. FICTION. Thompson, 6-foot-4 inches tall, had a 44-inch vertical leap. He told The Charlotte Observer in 2009, “I could tip a quarter off the top of the backboard, but I couldn’t put anything else up there.”

7– Holladay Hall, NC State’s first building, was built with 1.5 million “penitentiary bricks” made at the State Prison in Raleigh. TRUE. Holladay Hall was built with bricks made at the State Prison. The brick-making operations was such an economic boon for the prison that several state buildings of the 1880s were constructed with penitentiary brick—including the Executive Mansion and the original Supreme Court building.

8– There is a tree to represent each of North Carolina’s 100 counties in the Court of North Carolina. FICTION. There are not and never were 100 trees in the Court of North Carolina.
9—Everett Case introduced the use of a noise-meter during games to build crowd intensity.
FACT. Case also began the tradition of cutting down nets after a tournament victory and is thought to be one of the first coaches to use film to study a basketball opponent.

10—Harrelson Hall was supposed to be so stories high, but builders scaled back because the weight of the building would cause it to sink.
FICTION. Harrelson was originally planned to be four stories, but the extra floor was added because of cost. (Another pervasive myth is that Harrelson is sinking, but it is firmly standing.)

11—The original design of the Brickyard didn't include bricks.
FACT. The original plans called for Belgian block, a hand-cut granite cobblestone. But that was deemed too expensive. The landscape architect, Richard C. Bell '20, altered the plans for the Brickyard, officially called University Plaza, which was finished in 1969.

12—Students protesting mandatory chapel service once dragged a bear in the old Pullen Hall.
FACT. In 1914, a group of students kidnapped a bear that was housed in a tiny zoo in Pullen Park and brought it to the chapel just before the compulsory daily services were to begin. The 1914 Agromeck includes a sketch of students dragging a caged bear across campus.

13—Bragaw Residence Hall is only four stories high and is X-shaped because it was built on a geographic fault.
FICTION. There is no fault under Bragaw, which was the first modernist dorm to be built on campus, according to Michael Harwood, former university architect and current associate vice chancellor of Centennial Campus Development.

14—A steam whistle once signaled class changes.
FACT. The campus whistle, nicknamed “Old Faithful,” was a Lunkenheimer size three, bronze balance, three-tone whistle. It sounded to indicate class changes, mealtimes and to warn students of campus fires. College administrators replaced Old Faithful in May 1946.

15—Fraternities would send pledges out to answer a trick question: How many bricks did it take to complete the student center or the NC State College Smokestack?
FICTION. Fraternities would send pledges out to answer a trick question: How many bricks did it take to complete the student center or the NC State College Smokestack? It was asked to contact “the parties interested” in the dead burled on the college grounds” in order to have the bodies moved and buried elsewhere.

16—Holladay Hall, the first building on campus, was built near a burial ground.
FACT. In 1887, rumor had it that disturbed spirits were responsible for a fire that destroyed some woodwork just before the building was completed. A reference in the minutes of a trustees meeting that year indicate the existence of a cemetery. The chairman was asked to contact “the parties interested in the dead buried on the college grounds” in order to have the bodies moved and buried elsewhere.

17—There is an active nuclear reactor on campus.
FACT. Starting in 1950, with the design and construction of the R-1 reactor, there have been four nuclear reactors at NC State. The R-1 was the first nuclear research reactor to be designed, built and operated by an academic institution.

18—Coach Jim Valvano wore red underwear on game days.
FACT. Sports Illustrated reported in a January 1993 story that twice during his career Valvano had “rocketed off the bench to scream. . . . and blacked out. . . . and five or six times every season the backside of his suit pants had gone rrr-rrip! He wore Wolfpack red underwear just in case.”

The number of bricks on campus is a result of a wealthy benefactor who agreed to donate thousands of bricks with the understanding that NC State must use a certain amount each year.
FICTION. It’s true that our campus has a large number of bricks—all but two of the buildings on main campus are brick. But no brick-loving benefactor was involved; bricks used on campus were purchased. (There are two exceptions: The N.C. Bricklayers Association donated the bricks for the Brickyard, and Holladay Hall was built with bricks made by prisoners.)

NC State’s football team once wore pink and blue uniforms.
FACT. The North Carolina College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts played a football game against Raleigh Male Academy on March 12, 1892, in pink and blue uniforms. The team, then called the “Aggies,” won 12-6 in front of more than 2,000 spectators. It wasn’t until 1957 that the team wore red and white uniforms for the first time.