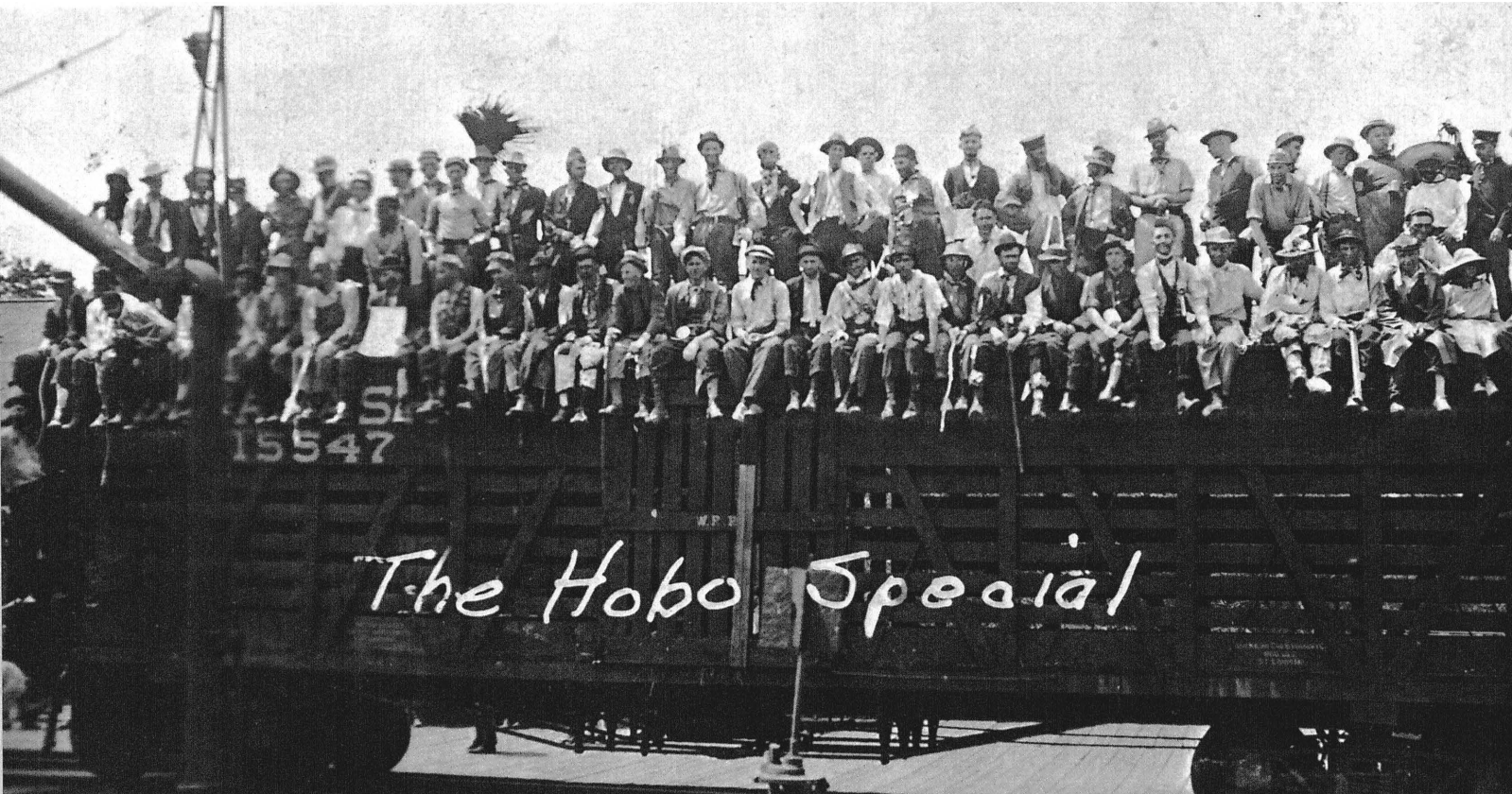


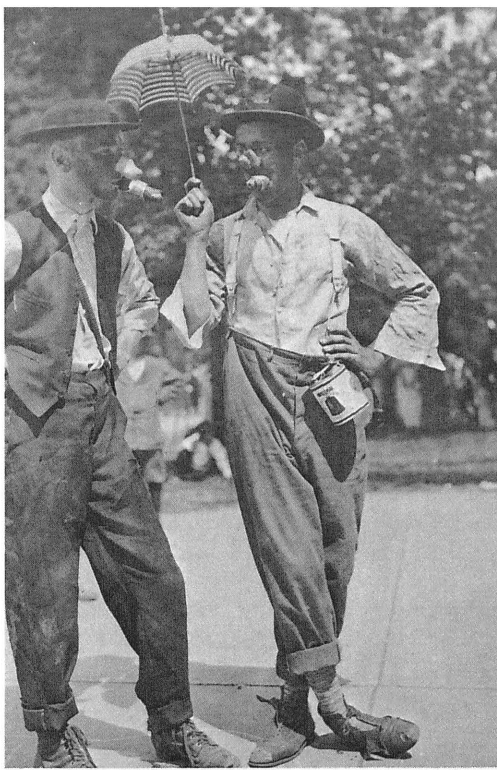
"A thousand miles without a red,
A side-door sleeper for a bed;
In a kind dame's kitchen freely fed,
And a jolly good fellow when all is said."

MIZZOU'S BUM TRIP



"The weary ones arrived on a special train of box-cars from Moore's switch, . . . and were met by a large crowd of students and townspeople. . . . The people of the town merit much praise for taking this affair in the right spirit and contributing good-naturedly to the students' fun making."—from *The Independent*, May 2, 1908 issue.





"The Hobo Convention is probably the most unique 'stunt' pulled off at Missouri and nearly always receives comment in the city dailies. It furnishes a harmless and inexpensive manner of relaxation, in which all students may participate, and an effort should be made to increase its importance." —*The Independent*, 1909.

By Lyndon B. Phifer, AB, BJ '12

Every spring, under the auspices of the Quo Vadis Club, most of the male students turned themselves into hoboes for one fun-filled day. But the club members prided themselves on actual experience in bumming their way on the common carriers of the day—the railroads. To qualify for membership in the Quo Vadis organization, a fellow had to produce evidence that he had traveled 1,000 or more miles as a hobo, slept in at least one box car, and "hit back doors with results." The total mileage of the eleven members in 1909 was 87,300. Their motto was "Please Mum," their colors "black and blue," their flower "dog fennel." Jack London was one of their "ornary" members, and the Missouri chapter, established October 13, 1907, called itself the Jack London Jungle. Club members recited the ditty printed at the top of the opposite page.

The Quo Vadis Club annually made arrangements with the Columbia-Centralia branch of the Wabash Railroad for the loan of a locomotive with a couple of box cars to carry Mizzou males masquerading as hoboes and tramps from a point well up in the railroad yards to the little station in downtown Columbia. [Active for almost 10 years, the Quo Vadis Club never had more than 10-20 members at one time. But the Hobo Day it sponsored involved most of the student body—including the author.]

We dressed in all sorts of outlandish tramp costumes, blithely ignoring the fact that hoboes were to be distinguished from bums and tramps by the fact that they were workingmen on the move in search of short-time jobs, did not detest work and dressed as decently as they could afford.

Some made themselves up as gentleman 'boes with false shirt fronts, tails, and seedy silk hats. Others looked more like clowns than tramps, wearing false whiskers, red noses, and various kinds of make-up. Still others chose more conservative but ill-fitting clothes and shoes, often with holes purposely cut in them.

I remember borrowing a pair of pants from a classmate much heavier and taller than I, using suspenders to hold them up on my spare frame. The sleeves of my friend's coat hung below my hands, and I made a ridiculous figure.

Most of us preferred to ride atop one of the box cars rather than inside. The ride was preliminary to a descent upon Columbia housewives. At each back door we would beg for handouts, making up piteous stories of hardship and want. Most of the ladies had prepared themselves for this annual begging spree by Missouri men, baking cakes, cookies, pies, preparing other goodies especially for us, just as today's housewives buy treats for costumed children calling "Trick or treat!" on Halloween.

Actually these homemade goodies handed out to us were highly appreciated by us make-believe 'boes, for our boarding houses or the U.D. Club did not ordinarily provide us with such luscious food. In paper or cloth bags or large bandana handkerchiefs we carried what we could not eat on the premises of our benefactors back to our rooms to enjoy on another day.

Ceremony was a part of the day's activity, and of course it was held in front of the Columns, which lent their dignity to the occasion. There the officers of Quo Vadis, known respectively as "the main prop," "prop," "buzzer," and "stake," conducted an initiation ceremony for new members who had qualified themselves with proper credentials while the rest of us looked on.

But Hobo Day was not over until we had descended upon the town's nickelodeons for free motion pictures (not called "movies" back then). No "nickel" proprietor would have been foolhardy enough to turn Mizzou 'boes away. A full house of deadbeats was better than the bad publicity resulting from a turn-away. □

L. B. Phifer, now of Tallahassee, Florida, retired in 1957 after editing various Methodist Church publications for 43 years. This story of Hobo Day was taken from a series of personal recollections he wrote about Mizzou campus life of 1908-12.