

DECEMBER 2010

[HOME](#)[ABOUT](#)[SUBSCRIBE](#)[ARCHIVES](#)[LETTERS](#)[CONTACT US](#)

Search Spectator...

# OLD GOLD

## *What's in a name?*

### *For The University of Iowa, lots of history and a little confusion*

If Old Gold had a list of top-10-asked reference questions at the University Archives (and well he should), surely one of them would be: When did the State University of Iowa become known simply as The University of Iowa?

Variations on that theme include: Weren't we once also known as Iowa State University? Aren't we still *officially* the State University of Iowa? Has confusion ensued?

The short answers are Oct. 22, 1964; sort of; yes; and yes. It's also correct to say that our esteemed institution has always been named the State University of Iowa. It's complicated, as they say.

Some background: The State University of Iowa was established in 1847 as the second official act of the General Assembly of Iowa. Lawmakers declared that the fledgling school would serve as the state's institution of higher learning, one that would provide the state its future doctors, lawyers, and other professionals. *The* state university, if you will. Eleven years later, in 1858, legislators established the Iowa Agricultural College and Model Farm at Ames. And in 1876, the Iowa State Normal School in Cedar Falls, a teacher-training academy, was founded.

During these early years of public higher education in Iowa, only the Iowa City institution included the word *university* in its title. This exclusive status seemed to allow SUI administrators to take liberties with the school's name, referring informally to it in catalogs and other publications as "Iowa State University" during a good part of the late 1800s. The practice, which never officially changed the SUI name, appeared to have ended by the 1890s. Official Board of Regents, State of Iowa, meeting minutes throughout this time consistently referred to "State University of Iowa," however.

In 1898, meanwhile, the Ames campus was renamed Iowa State College of Agricultural and Mechanic Arts; in 1959 it was again changed to its present-day Iowa State University of Science and Technology. The Cedar Falls campus changed its name in 1909 to Iowa State Teachers College, and again in 1961 to the State College of Iowa before finally adopting the University of Northern Iowa in 1967.

Let's see: By the early 1960s, Iowa's three public institutions share the words *state* and *Iowa*. What's worse, two of them even share the words *state*, *university*, and *Iowa*. Confusion ensues. What to do?

Mason Ladd, dean of the State University of Iowa College of Law, anticipated this situation in 1957, when officials at Ames proposed renaming that campus. Ladd, in a Dec. 7, 1957, memo to SUI president Virgil Hancher, pointed out that changing the Ames campus name to Iowa State University would be an "unconstitutional act. ... Furthermore, it would involve great confusion in our statutes and require material revision in wording throughout the Code where either the State College or the University are mentioned." (Papers of Mason Ladd, Box 6, folder "Brief – SUI Change of Name") Apparently, President Hancher did not pursue Dean Ladd's objection—or if he did was not successful—and ISC became ISU in 1959.

#### **NEXT MONTH:**

*How do you spell relief?*

*S-H-O-R-T-Y P-A-U-L, inventor of Roloids and Bufferin.*



Source—Iowa Digital Library, F.W. Kent Collection (RG 30.01.01), Faculty series

If you've got memories to share, please send them to [Spectator@IOWA](mailto:Spectator@IOWA) and we'll run some next month.

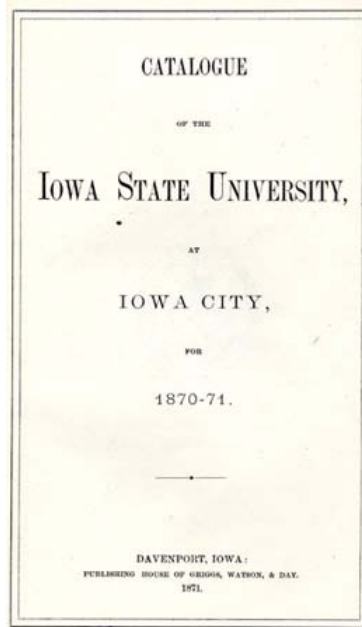
#### **Previous Old Gold editions:**

select edition ▾

By 1964, the name confusion that Ladd predicted became reality, frustrating SUI officials. Howard Bowen, by then president of the Iowa City campus, had an answer: Shorten the name of SUI in everyday usage to The University of Iowa, while retaining its full, original name for legal and other purposes. On Oct. 22, 1964, the Board of Regents approved a resolution authorizing just that (Board of Regents minutes, Oct. 21–24, 1964, pages 170–171).

To this day, people still occasionally (and understandably) confuse the names of Iowa's public universities. Old Gold and his colleagues at Iowa Agricultural College and Model Farm/Iowa State College of Agricultural and Mechanic Arts/Iowa State University of Science and Technology and Iowa State Normal School/Iowa State Teachers College/State College of Iowa/University of Northern Iowa are always pleased to clear up this question.

—David McCartney, University Archivist



**above:** Title page from the 1870 general catalog [General Catalogs Collection (RG 01.08)].

**top left:** Cover from the August 1904 Bulletin of the State University of Iowa New Series No. 90 [State University of Iowa Bulletin and Publications Collection (RG 01.09.01)].

**middle left:** An early attempt to assert a shortened name for the University in a letter from C.H. Weller, University Editor, to Walter Jessup, University President; Jan. 18, 1918 [Subject Vertical File Collection (RG 01.15.05), University History category, folder "Name of University of Iowa"].



**bottom left:** A view of the "Iowa State University" campus in Iowa City—not Ames—from the 1870-71 General Catalog [General Catalogs Collection (RG 01.08)].



© *The University of Iowa 2009*