

Bar None

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The following article published in the Gateway provides a fairly good reference to the history of Bar None, however at times the tone may be somewhat condescending or narrow in its scope. Prior to posting, minor editorial changes made by Stephen deGraaf, VP Academic, Agriculture Club, 2004-2005

Fifty-six years ago [1946], the Second World War had just come to an end. A large contingent of young men were returning home from battles overseas and climbing uneasily back to the university careers they had abandoned after combat tore them from their homes to defend a new world's ideology.

As they returned, a new crop of fresh-faced boys, and girls were just coming out of high school and enrolling at the University of Alberta. The two diverse groups, impossibly different in experience, merged together in classrooms and social settings. In an attempt to bring the war-weary men together in amity with the young group that seemed to be different in every respect, Bar None was born to unite the agriculture faculty. The event was later opened up to include all the University faculties and the monogram Bar None was coined as a welcoming for everyone to attend as none would be banned from the celebrations. The dance was designed to unite the campus and emphasize the attitudes that were common to all the students.

On 14 March, 1946, The Frontier Daze was the first incarnation of what became Bar None. Articles from the Gateway archives describe the event as a barn-dance rock-licked old-west hoe-down. Pie eating, face plastering and nipple feeding were just a part of the nights denim-inspired festivities.

In the following years, the affair expanded to include stunts leading up to the Bar None dance, which itself was amplifying to extreme proportions.

Mooing half-tons, riding boots, and publicity stunts added to the increasing excitement surrounding the dance. The Agriculture Club added a career fair to encourage business owners and executives to visit the campus.

The dance itself evolved into a wild affair. In 1968 alone, attendance reached 5300 people, crammed into the ice arena, whose seating capacity was actually only 2600. This year the five-piece orchestra booked to play the event was forced to do so while crammed into the only space left – the penalty box.

Prior to 1981, Bar None was actually a dry event, with no alcohol sold during the dance. Students would begin “preparing” for the event days in advance making for a rowdy evening once all had arrived. Once it became licensed, the injection of inhibition served only to heighten antics. At one dance streakers crashed through the doors only to be promptly arrested, loaded into a police car naked, and left in the back with the windows down in the company of German Shepherds until the end of the night.

Bar None began as an attempt to mix the students. Petty jealousies and frivolous competition among the faculties has always existed and it was an attempt to relieve some of the tension that builds. But, somewhere along the line, part of that idea was lost and rivalries between engineering, business and education became an official part of Bar None. In the '60s and '70s, faculty rivalries led mischievous students to do everything from riding donkeys into the Education building to releasing greased pigs into engineering parties. Red Norby, a '69 graduate, reported his classmates even went so far as to hide a bucket of hog manure in the air ducts of the chemistry wind which caused an unbearable stench to waft through the halls of the opposing students.

In the name of good wholesome farming fun, the Agriculture students kidnapped the Engineering president and tied him to a couch while parading him around campus in the late '90s. They have also, allegedly, been responsible for stealing flags from other faculties, flour-bombing engineering offices, and dropping livestock feces on rivaling department buildings. Folklore also states someone once backed an old stationwagon named the Law into an engineering building then slammed on the breaks, causing smoke to set off fire alarms and cause a great deal of havoc.

In 1999, the official Bar None parade, which used to include the annual procession of tractors, horses, and various hikinks through the campus, was cancelled. Due to liability reasons, organisers of this year's event [2001] say they are keeping things clean and do not plan on matching any of the more destructive debauchery seen in the '90s. Instead cattle lovers can don their favourite belt buckles and pointy-toed boots in favour of a week of clean, organized events.

If you've got a side of beef stowed in your basement apartment, you may want to consider carving it up and making a batch of Ma's best chilli for the the chilli cook off on 12 November, which kicks off Bar None. Timelessly classy, and always good for a giggle, mechanical-bull riding will be going down in CAB on the 13 November, and an agriculture career fair will be held on the 14 November in Dinwoodie Lounge. If you're considering pursuing a future in tractor racing, cow hurdling, pig wrestling, or even a real agriculture job, it will definitely be the place to be. There will also be a semi-formal dinner at Northlands that evening with all proceeds of the event going to STARS Air Ambulance.

Farmer sports will be the flavour of the day on 15 November with teams from different faculties partaking in fence building, straw-bale roping, and other such wrangler-friendly contests. A warm-up dance is planned for later that evening as the final preliminary to the main event. Saturday, 16 November, is the official Bar None dance, which is being held at the Agricom this year. Approximately 2000 cowboys and cowgirls are expected to descend on the event for good two-stepping amusement. There will be a free shuttle bus leaving from the Butterdome all night, so if you're planning on dipping into the old moonshine, do it responsibly and take advantage of the safe ride.

While the Bar None of today may have little surface resemblance to the dances of yore, the organizers are trying to bring back the spirit of togetherness. Phasing out the gratuitous hazing of other faculties and returning to an intent to include everyone is sure to make the party livelier than ever. Wrangle up some spirit and enjoy!