



Symbols Of History *Engraved In Gold*

PHOTOS BY PATRICK DANIELCZYK '03
REPORTING BY LAURA SANDERS '07

One of the oldest and certainly the most visible tradition of Texas A&M University is the Aggie Ring. In the same way Aggies wear their Rings to show pride in their university and unite in Aggie Spirit, The Association of Former Students keeps four collections of Rings to show where the college began and highlight significant points in the university's history.

This year marks the 125th anniversary of the Aggie Ring. In the next four pages, *Texas Aggie* takes you through the changes and events in history that affected the Ring design that is so widely recognized today.



▲ THE JOSH STERNS '99 AND MEMORIAL RING COLLECTIONS

◀ AS SEEN ON THE COVER OF THIS ISSUE OF TEXAS AGGIE, THESE AGGIE RINGS SPAN FROM 1889 TO 2014 AND SHOW THE DESIGN CHANGES OVER TIME.

1889



The oldest known Aggie Ring, from the Class of 1889, featured the letters “A M C” intertwined on the crest. This is the oldest Ring in The Association’s collections, which is a replica of the Aggie Ring that belonged to **C.B. Welhausen, Class of 1891**. It represents one of the first designs before the Aggie Ring was standardized and, though very worn, reflects the intertwined letters from the 1889 design. The first Class Ring to include symbols that are used in the current Ring design was submitted by E. C. Jonas, Class of 1894.

The Welhausen Ring is part of the Aggie Ring collection that was created by **J.B. “Josh” Sterns, Class of 1899**, who collected one Ring from each Class spanning from 1899 to 1964 by writing more than 4,000 letters over a three-year period to former students and families of deceased Aggies, asking them to donate Aggie Rings to be part of a permanent collection. In return, they were allowed to order a replacement Ring. As the A&M College of Texas changed to Texas A&M University, Sterns said, “It’ll have to be up to someone else to collect the Senior Class Rings from Texas A&M University.” On Jan. 15, 1970, Sterns presented his collection to The Association of Former Students, and it is on permanent display in the Clayton W. Williams, Jr. Alumni Center.

The first Class Ring to include symbols that are used in the current Ring design was designed by E. C. Jones, Class of 1894. A New York-based firm cast the first Rings in gold, but it was discovered they were weighted with lead. Starting with the Class of 1900, Dallas-based Linz Brothers Jewelry Company made the Aggie Ring for \$10.50.

1898



This Ring belonged to **Germain F. Foutrel, Class of 1898**, and differs noticeably from the Class of 1891 Ring. During this time, the design was not standardized and changed from year to year. With the eagle on the crest, and the state seal on one shank and a crossed rifle and saber on the other shank, this is the earliest design that bears a resemblance to the Aggie Ring that is recognized today. Foutrel’s Ring is part of the collection of **Rings of Special Significance**, which includes notable Rings and the Rings of notable Aggies.

1932



Also included in the Rings of Special Significance collection is the Aggie Ring of General **James Earl Rudder ’32**. The barely-visible engravings on the sides are similar to the design of the Class of 1898 Ring. The letters “A M C” and the eagle are still visible on the crest and the Class year is no longer black.

1933



This Class of 1933 Ring belonged to **Jerome A. McDavitt '33** and it lives in the Sterns Ring Collection. In this design, the school name on the Ring was changed to "Texas A&M College," but the eagle and the designs on the Ring shanks remained the same. In 1933, an official Senior Ring Committee was appointed to oversee changes to the Ring design and control Ring manufacturing and distribution. Without the formation of the committee, the Aggie Ring program would not exist today.

1963



In 1963, the A&M College of Texas became a university and the engraving on the Aggie Ring changed to "Texas A&M University," which is reflected on the seal. This Ring belonged to **Mary Kim Stalling '80** and shows the name change on the crest, as well as the flags that were added to the design in 1935. It is the oldest woman's Ring in The Association's Ring Collections.

Stalling's Ring is part of the **Memorial Ring Collection**, created to continue Josh Sterns's legacy. These Rings have been donated by families of deceased Aggies, and there is one for each Class year going back to 1965. The only exception is the Class of 1995, which is represented by **Gena P. '95** and **Joel A. '95 Johnson**, who were killed in a car accident. Their Aggie Rings are displayed together. The Josh Sterns '99 Ring Collection and the Memorial Ring Collection are showcased in a single, continuous arch on the Neely Mezzanine, representing a timeline of Aggie Rings.

1935



These Rings belonged to **Bruce Spencer '37** and are part of the **Polly Wiseman Franklin '86 Ring Collection**. Spencer lost his Aggie Ring while hunting, so his children bought him a replacement. A few years later, he returned to the same hunting spot to discover that the original Ring had been found.

This design reflects changes made in 1935, when the flags of Texas and the United States were added to the side shanks of the Ring, and the school name engraved on the Ring changed to "A&M College of Texas."

Since the Sterns and Memorial collections include only one Aggie Ring from each Class year, if an Aggie Ring is donated for a Class year that has already been filled, the family of that Aggie has the option to donate the Ring to a separate, rotating Ring display. The **Polly Wiseman Franklin '86 Ring Collection** lives in the Aggie Ring Office and showcases Aggie Rings on a rotation of about three months. Established in 2003, the Ring case has a permanent section devoted to Polly Wiseman Franklin, given in loving memory by her parents, **Patricia and Charles Wiseman '57**. At the opposite end of the case, another permanent section is devoted to **Col. William E. Campbell '52**, who was reported missing in action in 1969 while on active duty in Vietnam.

In 2013, The Association of Former Students welcomed about 33,890 guests in the Clayton W. Williams, Jr. Alumni Center on Aggie Ring Days in April, September and November.



These Rings—representing the Class of 1983 (left) and the Class of 1933 (right)—show the standardized design and some minor embellishments over the next 50 years. The entire Ring was enlarged and the seal was raised in 1943, which is also reflected here. With that, the design was patented and a contract to manufacture the Aggie Ring was awarded to Balfour in 1948. Since 1949, the company has made Rings for each graduating Texas A&M Class.

In 2013, the Aggie Ring Office placed 12,085 Ring orders. The finishes selected within those orders were 63 percent natural; 34 percent antique; 2.5 percent polara; and just under 1 percent white gold.

1983



When Bonfire fell in 1999, more than 30 Aggie Rings were left in tribute at the flagpole near the place where the Bonfire Memorial now stands. Using the engraved names on the inside of the Rings, all were returned to their owners—all except one. The name inside this Class of 1983 Ring had been removed and, therefore, the Ring could not be returned. Since then, this Ring (also seen in the opening photo) has served as a lasting reminder of the unbreakable bond between Aggies. It is on display in The Association's collection of Rings of Special Significance.

1998



Prior to 1998, all Aggie Rings were created in two pieces and then soldered together—the shanks and the underside were cast separately from the rope-trimmed top that contains the Class year. In 1998, Balfour started manufacturing the Aggie Ring as one solid piece, instead of two. The new construction also introduced, for the first time, a natural gold finish.

This Ring, which is in the **Memorial Ring Collection**, belonged to **Andi McKenna '08**. It shows the natural finish and the solid construction of the Ring. The one-piece Ring prevents the top from coming loose and cracking, and creates an overall more durable Ring.

These pictures are only a sample of the many Rings on display in the Clayton W. Williams, Jr. Alumni Center. The way the Aggie Ring bonds generations of Aggies is one of the joys of being a former student. It is The Association's privilege and honor to protect these shiny pieces of history and provide a lasting legacy for all Aggies.

For more details on the history of the Aggie Ring, visit tx.ag/ringhistory.

You can view The Association's collections in their entirety by visiting the Clayton W. Williams, Jr. Alumni Center. The Williams Alumni Center is open Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m., and Saturdays from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m. For holiday hours of operation, call 979-845-7514 or visit AggieNetwork.com.