

Reptile Attractions - The Story of Testudo

The story of the University of Maryland's Testudo.

By Anne Turkos, University of Maryland, University Archivist

The University of Maryland's Class of 1933, wishing no longer to be known as the "Aggies" or "Old Liners," sought the approval of University of Maryland President Harry Clifton Byrd for an official campus mascot.

At the time, the student newspaper was The Diamondback, so the choice of a diamondback terrapin seemed a logical one. The likeness of a living terrapin, named Gorham, was captured by sculptor Aristide Cianfarani, and the Gorham Manufacturing Company cast the bronze statue.

After dedication ceremonies in May 1933, the new 300-pound statue was christened Testudo and became subject to kidnappings by students from rival schools.

Years later the statue was filled with steel rods and cement. The now-1,000-pound Testudo was moved to a pedestal in front of the library in 1965, where it remains to this day.

Testudo is considered a good luck charm for students, and the statue has a shiny nose from all the rubbing it receives.

Recently, students began another good luck tradition of leaving Testudo items during final exams, such as flowers, food, lighted candles, coins, beer and computer disks.

Two smaller versions of Testudo have been installed in campus athletic facilities to spread the magic.

Purportedly, the original Gorham is stuffed, mounted and residing in a vault somewhere on campus.

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