

Rudy Hoffstetter: Author of Perryville's alma mater

By Kate Martin, Communications Director
Perry County School District 32

Rudolf Hoffstetter was an 18-year-old member of the Perryville High School football, debate and basketball teams in 1920 when he penned the PHS alma mater.

"In the Heart of Perry County" was introduced on Sept. 13, 1920 at the unveiling of the senior pennant for the PHS Class of 1921. Rudy set the lyrics to the tune of "Mid the Hills of Old Missouri," then the alma mater of the University of Missouri.

Rudy was born in Perry County in 1902, the son of Emmanuel and Mary (Hanson) Hoffstetter. He had six siblings — sisters Alma Baue and Flora Hamper, and brothers Walter, Edwin, Herbert and Fred.

He attended the "new" Perryville High School, constructed in 1917 at the corner of Magnolia and Church Streets. While in high school, he was also a member of the track team, the dramatic club, The Tuba (yearbook) staff, and SOS, a society of senior boys. He was president of the debate and current history clubs, and a prolific writer for the yearbook.

After graduating, Rudy enlisted in the US Coast Guard, serving from 1924-1951. He is a veteran of both World War II and the Korean War. He and his wife Sydney, who was a school teacher in Oregon, had two children, Sydney Hallenberg and Fred Hoffstetter. They made their home in Roseburg, Ore.

Rudy's granddaughter Deb (Hallenberg) Deutsch remembers Rudy as a great entertainer.

"He loved Mark Twain, and like Twain was a great storyteller with a flair for the dramatic," she said. "He entertained everyone with tall tales and interesting stories about his life, that I'm sure he embellished. He liked to begin one story this way, 'It was a dark and stormy night, the prisoner and sheriff sat on the stump, in the hills of old Missouri ...' and then ad lib from there."

When he retired, Rudy moved back to Missouri.

"He lived in Fred's Flower Shop in Perryville with his brother Fred and sister Flora and his nephew, Jack. When his health began to fail when he was around 90, he moved in with my parents, Charles and Sydney Hallenberg, in South St. Louis and lived there until it was necessary for him to go to a nursing home."

While living in Perryville, Rudy enjoyed going to the American Legion, and playing the

stock market, at which Deb said he was “quite astute.” He also enjoyed cooking, she said, and had worked as a cook in the Coast Guard.

“He enjoyed being in the woods around Perry County where his siblings had built a cabin, and we all enjoyed going there for family reunions,” she said.

Deb and her siblings, Chuck and Peggy called him “Papa.”

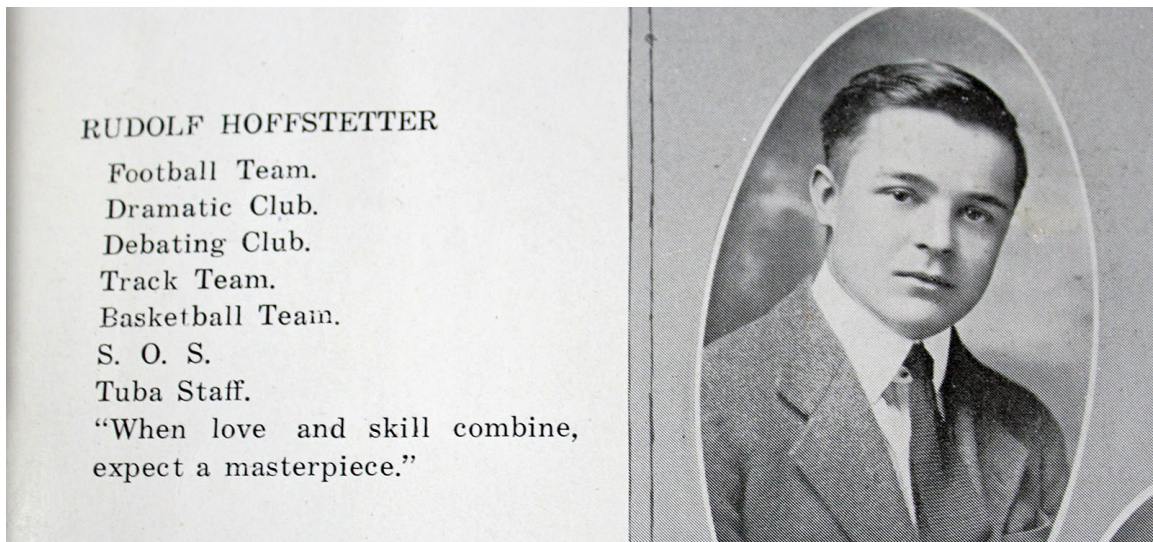
“I was really crazy about my grandfather — he was a very entertaining and devoted grandpa,” she said.

Rudy died on Oct. 27, 1993 and is buried at Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery in St. Louis.

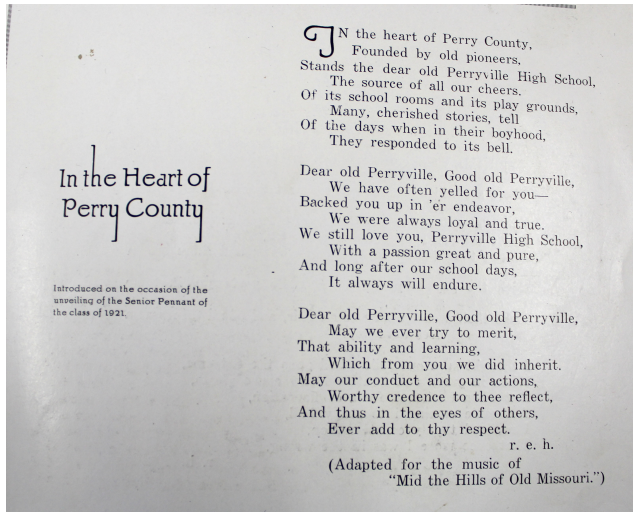
Although he is gone, his song lives on at his “Dear Old Perryville High.”

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Photos and cutlines:



Rudy Hoffstetter was an 18-year-old senior at Perryville High School when he wrote the PHS alma mater, “In The Heart of Perry County.”



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In the Heart of Perry County
By Rudolf E. Hoffsetter

In the heart of Perry County,
Founded by old pioneers,
Stands the dear old Perryville High School,
The sources of all our cheers.
Of its school rooms and its play grounds,
Many, cherished stories, tell
Of the days when in their boyhood,
They responded to its bell.

Dear Old Perryville, Good old Perryville,
We have often yelled for you —
Backed you up in 'er endeavor,
We were always loyal and true.
We still love you, Perryville High School,
With a passion great and pure,
And long after our school days,
It always will endure.

Dear old Perryville, Good old Perryville,
May we ever try to merit,
That ability and learning,

Which from you we did inherit.
May our conduct and our actions,
Worthy credence to thee reflect,
And thus, in the eyes of others,
Ever add to thy respect.

r.e.h

(Adapted for the music of "Mid the Hills of Old Missouri")