

26. Rochester Pinafore

David MacAdam

There have always been Christmas parties in the Institute, but in some years they are much more elaborate than others. In the early 1960s there were some rather remarkable ones. One was the subject of an editorial by David MacAdam in the *Journal of the Optical Society of America*.¹³

The “very model physics doctor of philosophy” on the editor’s page for March brought out of hiding the following parody on Gilbert and Sullivan’s “When I was a Lad” from *H. M. S. Pinafore*. It arrived anonymously, but discreet inquiries established the facts that it was 1) composed by the faculty of The Institute of Optics at the University of Rochester, 2) presented at a student-faculty Christmas party at the Institute in the early 1960s, and 3) a response to a student-presented skit roasting the faculty. A significant research and thesis might be done by some Ph.D. candidate who would undertake to bridge the “two cultures” by studying the devotion of physicists (especially optical physicists?) to Gilbert and Sullivan and their propensities and skills in writing parodies on the patter songs.

1. When I was a lad I sought my degree
At the Optics school on the Genesee.
I studied hard and I studied long
And I even learned some Optics as I went along.
CHORUS: He even learned some optics as he went along.

I learned my Optics so cleverly
That now I am the holder of a P-H-D.
CHORUS: He learned his optics so cleverly
That now he is the holder of a P-H-D.
2. When I studied as a freshman, I never did stop.
And soon my grades reached the very, very top.
As an honor student I acquired some fame
Copies of my papers earned a special name.
CHORUS: Copies of his paper earned a special name.

I copied all my papers with hand so free
That now I am the holder of a P-H-D.
CHORUS: He copied all his papers with a hand so free
That now he is the holder of a P-H-D.
3. In my sophomore year I did excel.
I took my courses and passed them well.
In math and physics I became quite skilled.
And my thirst—for knowledge—could never be filled
CHORUS: And his thirst—for knowledge—could never be filled.

But I curbed my thirst so effectively
That now I am the holder of a P-H-D.
CHORUS: But he curbed his thirst so effectively
That now he is the holder of a P-H-D.

4. In my junior year I studied every night
 While Maxwell's equations I did recite.
 The paths through lenses I computed and drew
 And Diffraction Theory I did pursue.
 CHORUS: And Diffraction Theory he did pursue

 I pursued my course so cleverly
 That now I am the holder of a P-H-D.
 CHORUS: He pursued his course so cleverly
 That now he is the holder of a P-H-D.

5. In my senior year I reached my goal
 And I was given my parchment scroll.
 I stood in line for my Bach. degree
 I dangled at my side my Phi Beta Key.
 CHORUS: He dangled at his side his Phi Beta key.

 I flaunted that key so conspicuously
 That I was rewarded with a P-H-D.
 CHORUS: He flaunted that key so conspicuously
 That he was rewarded with a P-H-D.

6. When I got my degree my folks were mad
 'Cause instead of earning money I became a grad.
 Of optical knowledge I'd acquired such a grip
 I managed to acquire an assistantship.
 CHORUS: He managed to acquire an assistantship.

 That assistantship did so well by me
 I'm almost sorry I've a P-H-D.
 CHORUS: That assistantship did so well by him
 He's almost sorry he's a P-H-D.

7. As a lab instructor we had light to diffract
 And lenses and prisms to refract.
 I counseled my students with advice of sorts
 I made up the grades for their lab reports.
 CHORUS: He made up the grades for their lab reports.

 I guessed at the grades so cleverly
 That now I am the holder of a P-H-D.
 CHORUS: He guessed at the grades so cleverly
 That now he is the holder of a P-H-D.

8. I studied so hard I never did sleep.
 Soon my grades were at the top of the heap.
 I did so well on every quiz
 I took my quals and was quite a whiz.
 CHORUS: He took his quals and was quite a whiz.

 I took them each time so cleverly
 That eventually I got my P-H-D.
 CHORUS: He took them each time so cleverly
 That eventually he got his P-H-D.

9. Now students all, wherever you may be
 If you want to rise to the top of the tree
 If your soul isn't fettered to a light-lab stool
 Be careful to be guided by this golden rule—
 CHORUS: Be careful to be guided by this golden rule—

If you have to learn your subject, learn it cleverly
And you all may be holders of a P-H-D.

CHORUS: If you have to learn your subject, learn it cleverly
And you all may be holders of a P-H-D.

While Dr. MacAdam did not divulge the author of the lyrics of the song in his editorial, rumor has it that such parodies were just one of the many talents of faculty member Phillip Baumeister.