

The Bulletin

Oberlin Celebrates Illumination, Homecoming This Weekend

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This past Homecoming weekend, Oberlin College organized Fall Illumination. The event showcased vibrant Japanese lanterns strung across Tappan Square along with food trucks and music.

Rain attempted to dim the excitement on Saturday night. However, in true Oberlin fashion, musicians kept spirits up with performances from OC Taiko, OSteel, and Conservatory Jazz Ensemble.

Illumination, which previously served as a kickoff for Commencement activities, first occurred in 1860 as a way to celebrate the election of President Abraham Lincoln. It took around 43 more years for the lanterns to return thanks to Professor of Botany Frederick O. Grover. After the Harvard alum saw lantern displays in Harvard Yard, he brought the celebration back to Oberlin at the May 1903 inauguration of Oberlin President Henry Churchill King.

Following a day of inauguration festivities, including speeches from faculty and important community figures, audience members were invited to a concert.

After the concert, the audience opened the doors of a nearby church and stumbled upon a transformed Tappan Square.

"When the audience poured out of the church, it was to find the campus brilliantly lit with Japanese lanterns, strung in glittering ribbons from the roof of the library, the top of the flagpole, and the highest branches of the trees," the 1904 *Hi-O-Hi* reads.

Illumination continued fairly consistently until 1932, when the event was canceled due to financial reasons. Due to outcry from the community, Illumination returned in 1933 and became the Commencement and Homecoming tradition we know today.

In 2020 and 2021, the event was virtual, and in 2022, it was scaled back due to COVID-19 precautions. In May 2023, the College held its first full-scale Illumination event in three years.

Over the summer, it was announced that Illumination will take place twice a year. Following 2021, reunion classes began holding events during the fall, expanding Homecoming weekend programming. For the foreseeable future, students, faculty, staff, and community members can expect to experience Illumination during both Homecoming and Commencement.



Community members hang lanterns before 1964 Illumination.

Photo courtesy of the Five Colleges of Ohio Digital Collections



Illumination lanterns light up Tappan Square in 2016.

Photo courtesy of Anna Norris



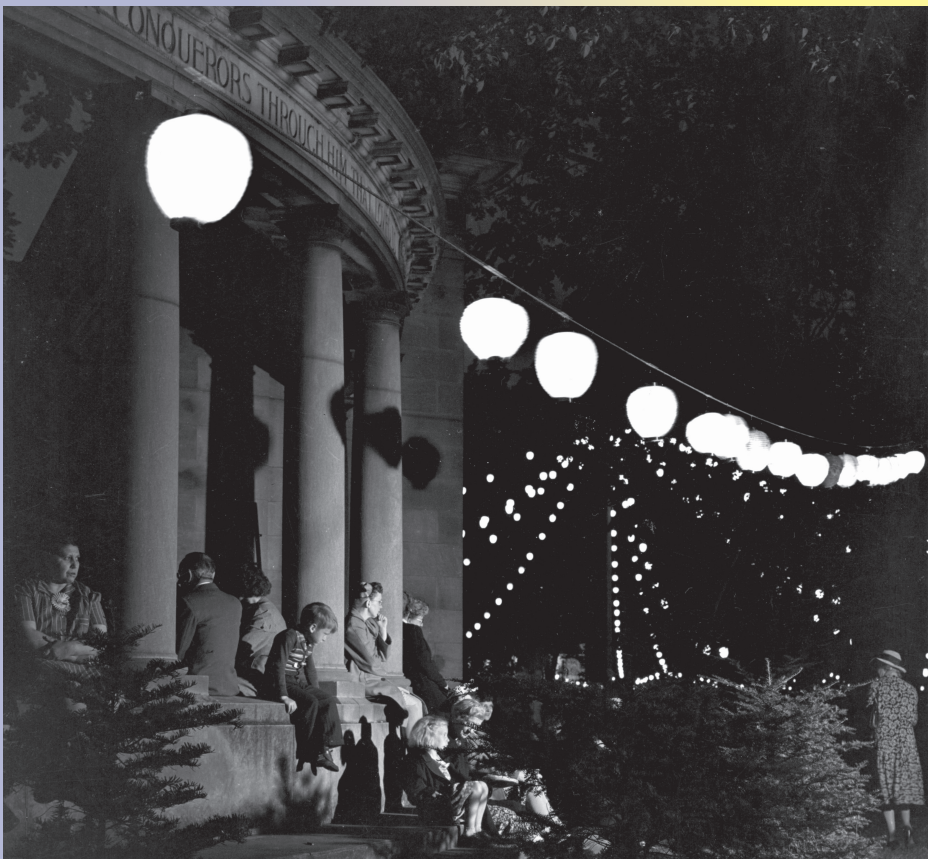
Approximately 1,300 lanterns are strung on Tappan Square, requiring 16 people.

Photo courtesy of Yingran Zhang



Families of graduates view student artwork during Illumination night in 2009.

Photo courtesy of Jeff Hagan



People sit on the Memorial Arch overlooking the 1946 Illumination.

Photo courtesy of Arthur Ewing Princehorn



Students enjoy food vendors at Illumination in 2018. In recent years, food trucks such as Cleveland Cookie Dough and Cheesy Dave's have been an addition.

Photo courtesy of John Seyfried