Do you wish for the “good ol’ days”? Frankly, I’m not sure I believe in the idea of “good ol’ days,” if by that phrase one means that the past is in general better than the present. Sure, I’m as susceptible as anyone to nostalgic selective memory. There is something I miss about the days of TV dinners with the family watching Mannix, 4-H exhibits at the fair, and Mrs. McGillicutty with her Halloween candy apples, (to name three random examples that inexplicably popped into my head). But many of these things still happen in one form or another (for example, would you believe that these days my family gathers, nibbling salads and scarfing Sloppy Joes, to watch Glee?) . . . and anyway, an occasional happy memory does not override some of the less rosy things from the past. For example, I am old enough to recall, in that same hall where the 4-H exhibits were housed, the “separate, but equal” restrooms. The signs were painted over, but with such a thin layer of whitewash that all could easily read who was supposed to go where—care to guess which of these “equal” bathrooms got cleaned and repaired first? Mrs. McGillicutty, as nice as she was to me and my friends, casually tossed out the “N-word” like a big ol’ rotten tomato. (I wonder if anyone else besides me remembers stepping around it to reach for another candy apple?) And don’t get me started about the women’s movement. Suffice it to say that I’m glad that my daughter and my son are growing up in this climate, as scary as it is, rather than in any endured by their ancestors.

So I guess I’m more of an optimist, looking forward with my rose-colored glasses to new days more often than looking back—usually, that is. Today is an exception. I’m looking back to 1921, the year that Sigma Pi Sigma was established. It was an era when five guys from Davidson College could

continued on page 5
2011 Recipients

Lauren Richey
Brigham Young University
“I am grateful for the opportunity I had to travel to Budapest to present my research and be part of an international community of physics students, and for the support from the American Institute of Physics (AIP) and Sigma Pi Sigma members that made it possible. Overall, the ICPS was very enjoyable and well-organized, creating a good mix of scientific discussion and cultural exploration. The conference consisted of student lectures, parties, a poster session, excursions to see the city, and guest speakers from thirty-five different countries.”

Lena Bradley
Penn State University
“This year marked the 25th anniversary of the ICPS and the 24th year of the International Association of Physics Students (IAPS) that now organizes it. Since its founding in 1986, the conference has been held in many cities across Europe, but ICPS returned to its home in Budapest in 2011 to celebrate this milestone. Overall, ICPS was a very rewarding experience.”

Thomas Markovich
University of Houston
“All in all, the ICPS was a great meeting—it is responsible for sparking my interest in international travel and collaboration. I met people from many different countries and enjoyed my discussions with all of them. It was really nice to talk to a variety of people about the different educational systems around the world. I would definitely recommend that SPS continue to fund this award. It provides students with a unique experience in a foreign nation that helps to significantly enrich their education.”

To see photos, abstracts, and full feature articles about the recipients’ experiences at the 2011 ICPS, please visit www.spsnational.org/programs/.

Program Support
SPS derives most of its support from the AIP. SPS dues are also an important contributor. These regular sources of revenue make possible the SPS publications and programs that are available to SPS members. The awards and scholarship programs of SPS are made possible, in part, through the generous contributions of Sigma Pi Sigma members and friends. In this way, the physics alumni, and especially Sigma Pi Sigma members, contribute to the generations of students who follow them.

The Good ‘Ol Days
continued from page 3

decide to start a physics honor society on their own, and perhaps because it was such a good idea and because nobody else was doing it, it stuck! Ninety years and more than 75,000 physicists later, Sigma Pi Sigma is still going strong.

By the way, here are a few other things that happened that year, somewhat randomly selected from www.thepeoplehistory.com:

• Einstein received the Nobel Prize in Physics.
• Adolf Hitler became chairman of the Nazi Party in his rise to power and prominence in Germany.
• Ku Klux Klan activities became violent throughout the southern United States.
• The Communist Party of China was formed with Mao Tse-tung as a founding member.
• The Chicago White Sox baseball team was accused of throwing the World Series.
• Coco Chanel introduced “Chanel No. 5”.
• Franklin D. Roosevelt, at 39 years old, contracted polio.
• One of the worst modern famines, killing tens of thousands, gripped Russia due to the crop failure.

It’s a curiously evocative list, and in some ways it makes my point better than I do, because of the imbalance of horrors and trivia, of profundity and triteness.

In this issue of Radiations, we do some reflecting back on the honor society origins and impact (see Earl Blodgett’s article on page 8), and on Rutherford (see Erin Grace’s article on page 6) and a little of both with pieces on NASA (see Dwight Neuen-schwander’s article and Elizabeth Hook’s article).

So, whenever you do feel the urge to slip on those rose-colored glasses and look back on some especially poignant nostalgic moment, consider doing an about face, occasionally—it works for me. 🦚