

STORIES of New Jersey

PREPARED FOR USE IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS BY THE
FEDERAL WRITERS' PROJECT of the WORKS PROGRESS ADMINISTRATION
472 Orange Street, Newark, New Jersey

THE FIRST FOOTBALL GAME

Every time Rutgers and Princeton meet on the gridiron they celebrate the anniversary of the first American intercollegiate football game, held at New Brunswick, November 6, 1869. Exciting as that was, the game that took place on the first Saturday in November, 1938 between the same institutions will probably hold first place in the hearts of loyal Rutgers rooters. On that day for the first time in 50 years, Princeton played on Rutgers' territory: this 36th game between the schools marked the dedication of the new \$1,000,000 Rutgers' stadium: the date of the game, November 5, lacked only one day of being the 69th anniversary of the first game: and finally, despite a nation-wide tradition that the school which dedicates a stadium generally loses the dedication game, Rutgers felt confident of victory over its old rival.

A sure sense of what would most infuriate the aroused Rutgers students led Princetonians on the eve of the game straight to an old black cannon on the Rutgers campus. Within sight of the banners flaunting Rutgers' defiance of their old time enemy, half a dozen Princeton men coolly painted bright orange stripes around the muzzle of the old cannon. Rutgers students, meanwhile, were smearing Princeton buildings, statues and walls with vivid scarlet paint. But Princeton had gone to the heart of the old feud by desecrating the Rutgers cannon, for between Rutgers and Princeton cannon means fight.

It meant fight so realistically 69 years ago that the first game was viewed at the time as an incident in a long contest over the possession of the historic cannon. In 1854 a Revolutionary cannon mysteriously disappeared from the New Brunswick campus. Since Princetonians had previously made off with Rutgers' cannon in 1836, Rutgers men quickly assumed that the rival school had done it again. Their suspicions became unshakable convictions when Princeton loftily declined to deny the accusation.

Although school authorities hopefully sanctioned the football game in 1869 as a means of settling the "cannon war," as it came to be known, the conflict persisted. In 1875 nine members of the class of 1877 at Rutgers set out for Princeton at night to recover the cannon. They had hired a box wagon and team and were armed with crowbars, pickaxes, shovels and ropes. They did not get to Princeton until one in the morning. Five men dug while the other four kept watch, and when the "Owl Train" came in with the late students, they hid. Foot by foot they dragged the cannon over the grass to the wagon, several hundred feet away, hoisted it in and quickly covered it with a tarpaulin. Just in time. Already the windows were being raised in some of the buildings, but no hue and