

File

Whatever Happened To Boxer?

by
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Note a
few minor
corrections

File

Naught but a spirit, did you say?
But that's been "spirited" away.
An emblem of our college yell,
A sign that all with us is well
In the realm of knowledge.

And now the naughty deed is done;
They tho't it just a lark for fun,
No more will incense from it rise,
In darknes[s] now it grieves and sighs,
For some companionship.

Will not our plea enlist some heart?
Will no one come to take our part?
Must we, aye, for our spirit sigh?
Some one will surely help us try
To find that Spirit.

The
Pacific Index
November 1899

"Boxer should be returned to its lawful possessors, the college and students, and prevent the secret service men from using force to obtain the Chinese idol."

The Weekly
Pacific Index
January 7, 1908

A Brief History

In 1898 Pacific University received a special gift from one of its alumni, Rev. J. Elkanah Walker. Shortly after graduating in 1867, Rev. Walker sailed off to China as a missionary. ^{In 1881} ~~Years later~~ he purchased a 16th-century bronze incense burner and shipped it to his mother, asking that she donate it to his alma mater. The 25-lb

statue, known as a *qilin* (pronounced "chee-lin") in anthropology circles, is a mythical beast with scales, hooves, and horns used to frighten away evil spirits. The figures were common in Chinese households.

The statue sent to Pacific acquired the name "Boxer" as a result of the Boxer Rebellion in China, a bloody uprising in northern China during the 1890s. The name comes from the *I-ho-ch'uan* (Righteous and Harmonious Fists), a secret society in China opposed to the spread of Western cultural and religious influence within its borders. Westerners nicknamed members of the group *Boxers*, because of their boxing-like movements. This name in turn led to the use of "dog" metaphors, obvious references to the boxer breed developed in Germany.

The first known "theft" of Boxer occurred in 1899 when a student, Richard Faulkner ('02) took the statue--then known as "College Spirit"--from its alcove in Marsh Hall's Brighton Chapel. The incident created quite a stir on campus and several news items and poems were published in the Index. The group behind the prank was the Class of 1902--they considered it to be their class mascot. College Spirit was eventually returned to the chapel and remained secure there until 1908 when it again disappeared. The January 7, 1908 Pacific Index carried the first printed use of the name "Boxer" and may be responsible for coining the new name. The emerging tradition of stealing, hiding, flashing and tossing the statue took root at this time. At first certain classes fought over possession of Boxer. Later, fraternities, sororities, athletic teams and other organizations competed for it.

The Boxer, sometimes referred to as the "Spirit of Pacific," has been the university's official mascot since 1969. The student body voted to replace the Badger--the mascot chosen in 1921--to avoid confusion with the university's two symbols. Far more people associated the school with Boxer due to the famous tradition of the "tosses." In the past these contests have involved up to 300 students over a period of several hours--in 1929 a Boxer Toss lasted nine hours!

Rumors of a "Boxer Toss" still ignite some student groups on our campus. Who has it? When will it appear? Where will the toss occur? These questions have been asked for 85 years on campus. Boxer, whether you support the concept or

not, has been an integral part of college life in Forest Grove for a very long time. This mythical beast from China is woven into the fabric of our history and is an enduring symbol of Pacific University. Boxer, in one form or another, is Pacific's oldest surviving tradition. Older alumni will often get misty-eyed when reminiscing over their experiences with Boxer. And the two most common questions from visitors to the Museum in Old College Hall are "what's Boxer?" and "where's Boxer?"

The Mystery Continues

The Boxer being hidden, tossed and fought over in recent memory is different from the one sent from China. The emotional and symbolic aspects may be similar, but this current statue is a replica of the original bronze idol.

Between 1908 and 1971 several different student groups took possession of Boxer and it would regularly disappear for two or three years at a time, always returning to campus. However, the original bronze statue was last seen on campus in 1971 during a routine "toss." Groups competing for the prize included the Black Student Union and the Phi Beta Tau fraternity.

Years drifted by without even a glimpse of Boxer and by the late 1970s students were concerned about its fate. Rumors circulated about the statue being melted down or thrown from the Golden Gate Bridge. By the early 1980s--following a decade without a Boxer Toss--the tradition was in danger of dying out completely.

In 1982 ~~Three~~ students--Kim Smith, Linda Parker, and Janet Leasher--arranged to have another statue cast in bronze so the tradition would not be lost. This Boxer, a reasonable facsimile of the original, was accepted by the students and has been flashed and tossed like the old one, right up until last May.

The dangers associated with a Boxer Toss have been well documented over the years. Recent accidents have prompted the university community to review the tradition and offer suggestions as to how the essence of the practice can be maintained without the potential injury to participants. The discussion will continue this year.

The mystery of the original Boxer's disappearance has yet to be solved. The Pacific University Museum and the Alumni Relations Office have joined together in an attempt to find out what really happened to this important historical artifact and university symbol. Boxer is certainly a unique college mascot--perhaps unmatched in the country--and the current students have a right to that legacy. Boxer has been a Pacific tradition for nearly a century and the entire university community deserves a solution to this puzzle.

Your Help Is Needed

If anyone has information related to the final disappearance of Boxer, regardless of how seemingly insignificant it may be, please contact either Rick Read, Archivist/Curator (503-359-2915) or Alice Hoskins, Director of Alumni Relations (503-357-6151). Please help us find Boxer! Please pass along any clues you may have about its fate or current resting place. All information will be kept confidential, if requested, and the return of Boxer will be gladly accepted, no questions asked. What will happen to Boxer if it does return to campus is still undecided--your ideas are certainly welcome. Tossing the original Boxer is not an option, however.