



GEORGE K. HELMKAMP

TRANSCRIPT (PDF)

July 22, 1998

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George Helmkamp, founding professor and artist in woodworking, reminisces about the early students on the Riverside campus and reflects on the creation of the University mace.

Excerpt from Transcript

Erickson: We have in front of us this beautiful mace that you made. Would you tell us how that came to be?

Helmkamp: I should hold it up, I guess.

Erickson: Yes, so the camera can get a good picture.

Helmkamp: They were having processions at graduation and somebody just mentioned that most processions are associated with a mace. Whoever is leading the procession is carrying some device, and we just had a discussion. I think it was in the associate deans meeting when someone proposed ... "shouldn't we have a mace and how do we get one made?"

Erickson: Um hmm.

Helmkamp: There was the one idiot who volunteered (to try to make the mace).

(laughter)

Since I did wood work, I decided I would try to make the mace.

Erickson: So did that mean that you designed it also?

Helmkamp: Designed it, yes. We decided as a group about some features that should be involved. We decided on the California bear. And the Great Seal, whichever is the Great Seal. This is the University of California seal, I guess, and

in the back it's the Great Seal of California.

Erickson: Oh, I see. I didn't see that one before.

Helmkamp: It turned out that the chancellor's office had this Great Seal and the Seal of California, and so all we had to do was find somebody to do the bear.

The last thing we wanted to do ... we wanted to have something representative of the Citrus Experiment Station. We wanted to have a gold orange, ...

Erickson: Yes.

Helmkamp: and the people who made the bear could not make the orange. It kept collapsing. So we just put a semi-orange piece on the bottom. That's as close as they could come in wood ...

Erickson: Sure.

Helmkamp: to represent that.

Erickson: Did somebody make a mold of the bear? Is that what you mean?

Helmkamp: Yes, um hmm.

Erickson: Well, tell us about the wood in there that you used.

Helmkamp: Most of the wood is koa from Hawaii, which I happened to have in my shop. The dark wood is desert ironwood, which comes from our local deserts.

Erickson: It's very pretty.

Helmkamp: So all the dark wood is

desert ironwood.

Erickson: And the orange is also the ironwood?

Helmkamp: No, the orange ... I don't even know what it is any more.

Erickson: It's so pretty. (pause) When did you become interested in working with wood?

Helmkamp: Oh, when I was about eight.

Erickson: Oh, no kidding. Was your father good, too ... good with wood?

Helmkamp: He didn't do anything like that.

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Oral History
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Last modified
01/22/2004 13:55:47