
'Boxer' Is Coming

By Mark Walters

"BOXER IS COMING, Boxer is coming!"

The words have swept across the Pacific University campus lately as students eagerly await (and administrators and townfolk brace for) an event that always turns this historical college into a center of tumult.

Student imaginations stir at the mere mention of Boxer's name. And for good reason. Whenever Boxer visits, students brawl for hours over several city blocks; classes are disrupted, and lecturers are bewildered to see their young audiences stampede away. Through it all, although they don't condone ordinary roughhousing, college officials and Forest Grove citizens just sit back and watch — usually with more than a mild degree of amusement.

JUST WHO — or what — is this "Boxer," who commands so much fervent attention in a relatively quiet college community; who has been dreamed of by generations of Pacific students; who transforms stable, red-blooded college youths into bruising, busting, kicking, mud-slinging "fanatics" and suddenly makes old alumni spry as they recall him?

To begin with, Boxer is an Oriental temple dog. He has triangular horns, spikes along his spine and a large, hideously bushy tail. Scales cover his entire body and his feet resemble cow hoofs. His mouth could be a cross between a shark's and a pig's.



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Ugly? To be sure. So how did this dubious-looking figurine ever achieve such high esteem? Around the turn of the century, it became great fun at Pacific to have possession of Boxer and several good-natured scuffles occurred over his ownership. At the time, students probably considered Boxer merely a good excuse for some rowdiness, rather than attaching any great importance to the idol, itself. But as years passed and the tales of the brawls grew more exciting and romantic, the Boxer Legend also grew. And Boxer eventually became important in himself. Now over 350 years old, he has



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come to be a unifying spirit at PU, a common denominator which still captures the imagination of virtually everyone at the college, past and present. And now, more than ever before, everyone wants him and will go to nearly any length to get him!

OUT OF THE early "skirmishes" over Boxer, it became understood that nobody would keep him permanently. He would be "flashed" — tossed up for grabs — regularly to keep his legend alive. Through the years, this has happened hundreds of times, and friendly but bruising brawls have always ensued.

Thought to be a product of the Ming Dynasty of China, Boxer started his long association with Pacific University around 1870 when Dr. J.E. Walker, a missionary and Pacific graduate of 1867 bought the 20-pound temple dog in China for \$5. In those days temple dogs were used to "guard" households from evil.

In the late 1880s, Dr. Walker sent Boxer to his mother as a present. This note accompanied the package:

"BOXER WAS an heirloom in the Laing family, and when his owner had to flee from the Long Haired Rebels, he took Boxer with him as one of the especially valuable possessions of the family . . . When we were coming home in 1881, he wished to make me some present, but was hard up, so he sold Boxer to me for about \$5. I would not undertake to replace it for many times this amount. No doubt there are collectors who would pay \$100 or more for it. . ."

The name "Boxer" was probably derived from the nickname given "The Iheckuan, Righteous League of Fists" by Europeans in China at the time of the League's uprising. "Boxer," of course, was the common name of the League and the rebellion.

In 1896, Dr. Walker's mother gave Boxer to the university and when he arrived at Pacific, Boxer was placed in a special position at the front of the school chapel. But his stay was a short one! A chapel speaker one morning in 1900 told of an Eastern university that had a foreign idol as its mascot. Before sunset, Boxer was spirited away by Richard Faulkner, class of 1902, and a tradition was born.

PACIFIC UNIVERSITY'S history is punctuated with tales of when Boxer was "flashed." An early one tells of when William Jennings Bryant visited the campus and asked to see the famed Boxer. He was obliged momen-

tarily when the idol was placed on the auditorium stage. But students immediately spotted Boxer and bedlam broke loose. When the "smoke" cleared, the stage was in near ruins and Mr. Bryant was deprived of his audience. His speech was postponed until the next day.

In one of the most famed Boxer stories, three male students, accompanied by their girlfriends, rented a plot in a graveyard and buried the dog. But the girls betrayed the scheme. Enlisting the dean of students, they returned to the cemetery, dug up Boxer and hid him elsewhere. The men knew nothing of it until the coeds flashed the idol at Herrick Hall, a dormitory. The men cried "dirty trick," according to the Index, the student newspaper, in its March 12, 1937 issue, but the girls merely replied "poor sports."

In 1955, Boxer returned to active campus life after a long absence. In the January 21 edition of the Index, a picture appeared of Boxer sitting on the previous week's issue of the newspaper. The caption said Boxer was still around, but no other information was disclosed. That fall, the idol was flashed and a group of five men gained possession . . . after a hearty battle. They in turn tossed Boxer out at a girls' dormitory meeting but were able to retrieve him from the distaff, bathrobed, hair-curlered mob. The girls got some satisfaction, though. They captured two of the culprits, perfumed them and drenched them with tubs of water.

MANY COLORFUL, sometimes hair-raising tales about Boxer-inspired brawls are unrecorded. The persons involved are not around to tell about them and only Boxer remembers. But it is known that he traveled across Europe, the Pacific Ocean and the United States, has been dismembered in the heat of "combat" and mended countless times and has been spirited away in broad daylight and in the dark of night under the most bizarre of circumstances.

And now, if the campus grapevine is to be believed, another chapter in Boxer's history is about to be written. Students are banding together, planning how to capture him once he reappears. Said one: "I may lose a couple of teeth, but I'm going to get him!"

When will Boxer come? Nobody, save his possessor, really knows. And he isn't talking. The element of surprise is three-fourths of the Boxer Legend . . .

Mark Walters is a Portland writer.