

Tuesday, April 28, 2015

Historical gem, hidden tradition

Students that frequent the Kresge Library may often pass a substantial piece of history without realizing what it is.

In a glass case near the right side of the library's entrance, there sits a black and gold staff. It may seem relatively unobtrusive from its corner in the library, but it's a huge part of the Oakland tradition.

Called a mace, this traditional object was brought to campus nearly 21 years ago by then-OU President Sandra Packard, who initiated the project.

Considered the symbol of Oakland University itself, this scepter-like mace is carried by an appointed university marshal during all commencements, convocations and inaugurations. It's meant to instill a sense of pride in the university and its ceremonies and is "one of the oldest traditions in academe," according to a **September 1994 OU News** article introducing the mace.

It was first presented during the September 1994 commencement and was carried by David Bricker, then the university marshal and philosophy professor.

Long-standing tradition

While many students might not be aware of the tradition, it's a fairly common one, according to Stephanie Lee, administrative associate for the vice president of academic affairs.

She explained that the mace hails from an old British custom, when maces were first carried by military commanders as weapons and symbols of authority. Maces have since transformed into the highly decorative, ceremonial pieces they are today, and are carried at most university ceremonies and processions. According to Lee, the mace is now mainly carried to protect the president by "one of authority."



Dr. Richard Rozek, interim dean and associate professor of the School of Health Sciences, carries the symbolic mace at all Oakland University commencements and convocations. As the University marshal, Rozek will also lead the procession at the April 29 inauguration of OU's 6th president, George W. Hynd.

"An institution's most sacred symbol of office is the mace," Lee said. "It symbolizes the authority that is vested in the president by the school – by the governing body – which would be the board of trustees."

The mace can be carried directly in front of the president to “protect” him or her, according to Lee. It can also be carried to lead on all of the dignitaries, or faculty and administration.

The current university marshal is Dr. Richard Rozek, interim dean and associate professor of the School of Health Sciences. Rozek has been teaching at OU since 1981 and has acted as university marshal since Bricker passed it on in 1995.

He said it was former President Gary Russi that first called Rozek and asked him to be the university marshal. When Rozek accepted, Russi walked over to the School of Health Sciences, which at the time was in West Vandenberg, to shake Rozek’s hand.

“At that time I told him that I would be his university marshal as long as he was president of Oakland University,” Rozek said.

A symbolic piece of OU history

Rozek’s role in this OU tradition goes even further than carrying it out; he has been involved since the very beginning, when a committee formed to design and develop the mace. Rozek was a key part in determining the length, design and logo on the mace.

“I’m really honored to have been part of the early years of establishing the tradition of the mace,” Rozek said.

After a few failed attempts at designing and creating in-house, Rozek and the committee turned to Paul Haig, class of ’73, and enlisted the help of him and a designer from his Rochester business, P.R. Haig Jewelers.

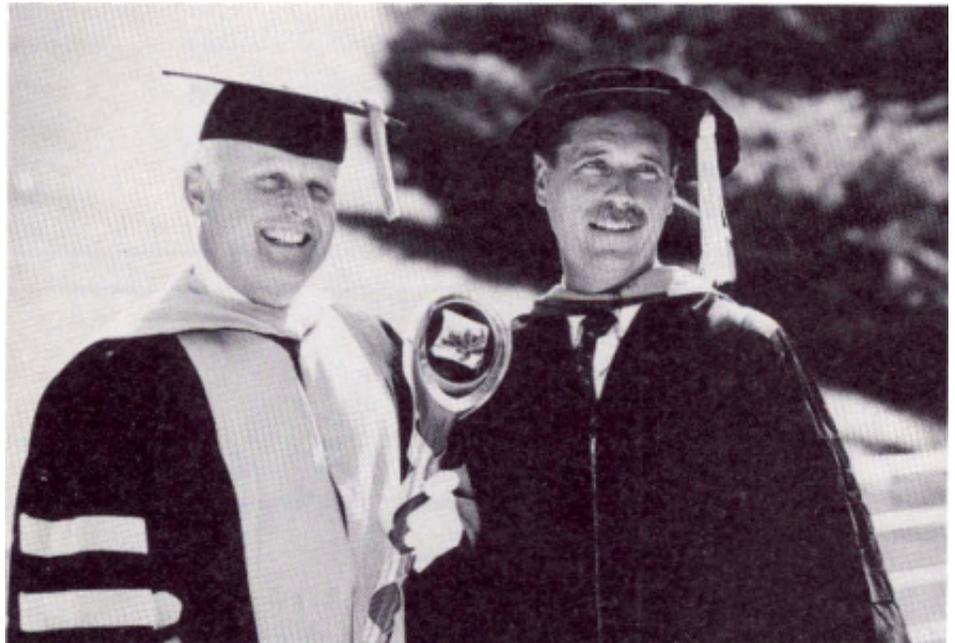
The designer, Robert Dobbie, worked closely with Rozek and the committee to create the mace, approximately eight pounds and 30 inches. It has a white oak handle trimmed with a sterling silver ribbon, a black obsidian disk on top ringed with silver, the university motto inscribed on it and a 14k yellow gold sail on each side of the obsidian disk.

On the base of the mace’s handle there is a gold oak tree, modeled after one Rozek found on campus and brought Dobbie to. They originally attempted to use a branch from the same tree for the shaft of the mace, but had to use another piece of burl oak.

“The oak is symbolic of nature’s strength and we were trying to convey a sense of history and permanence by incorporating that particular tree into our university mace,” Rozek said.

It’s been 20 years, and Rozek said he has no plans to give up the mace just yet. It’s an important part of OU’s tradition, and it’s important to him too.

“I think that tradition is a very important part of Oakland University, and I have been very proud and happy to be part of that tradition,” Rozek said. “I realize that it won’t be too long from now that I’ll be passing along the tradition of carrying the mace to another faculty member. Until then, I will carry it with pride.”



David Bricker, OU's marshal during the time that the mace was created, with OU's current marshal of nearly 21 years, Dr. Richard Rozek.