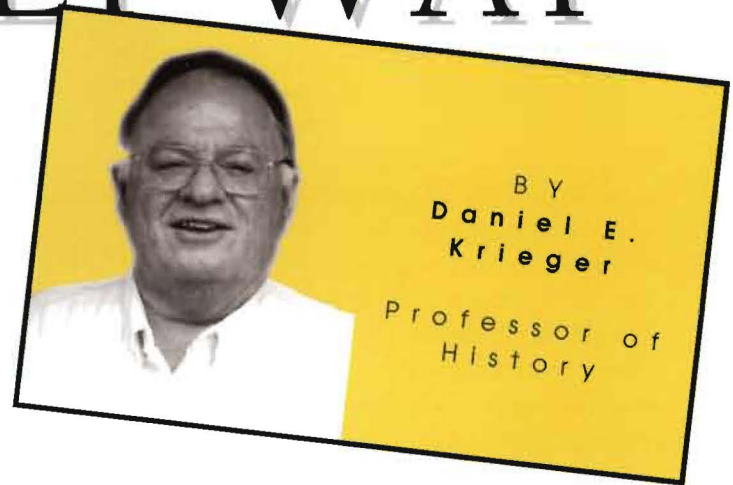


THE POLY WAY



*'You've got to learn to do things
the Poly way.'*

I heard those words spoken frequently by my fellow faculty members when I arrived at Cal Poly in August 1971.

At that time Poly had just fewer than 10,000 students and 500 faculty members. We knew one another's faces and within a few months could put names to more than half of those faces. President Robert E. Kennedy (1967-1979) would often walk down the hill from the administration building calling out greetings to dozens of students and faculty.

There was only one option for faculty and staff dining in what is now called the Veranda Cafe. The food was diverse, fresh, and inexpensive in those years of Vietnam War-era inflation. A significant percentage of campus employees ate there daily in shifts between the hours of 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. One day I would find myself having lunch—I loved Biology Professor Dick Krejsa's Poly farm-raised catfish—with someone from Transportation Engineering. The next day I might dine with the late Josie Sterns from Child Development. It

was a great way to get to know and understand what made Poly tick.

Most of the younger history and political science faculty had their offices in a series of World War II-era dorms and a small mess hall on the site of what became the Robert E. Kennedy Library. The complex was called "the Jungle," and for good reason: My office faced the afternoon sun. A previous occupant had mounted a thermometer on the inside wall. Even on "just warm" days during the fall and spring quarters, it "maxed out" at 110 degrees inside.

Yet the Jungle had its advantages too. Our one-person offices gave us more room than the two-person offices in the more elegant buildings. We were close to the library, then located in the Dexter Building, and the old agricultural education building. In the basement of the aged building was "the Coop," a minimal cafeteria with a few food machines where you could share afternoon coffee with friends and students.

Kennedy recalls when the adjacent administration building was being demolished to make way for the present clock tower building in 1941. The building was



so well constructed that the demolition team, headed by local contractor Alex Madonna, had to use dynamite. A very large chunk of the administration building sailed over the top of the agricultural education building and landed in the ground right next to the president's window.

The aged building was itself demolished in 1973 to make room for the architecture building. The impending demolition played a major role in my becoming interested in campus history and historic preservation. My research revealed that the building had been constructed by William Weeks, a highly regarded institutional architect who had designed nearly half the larger pre-1933 schools along the California coast.

We Jungle residents were also near the campus store with its home-baked bread and Poly-made cheeses. This was important because several of us had arrived at Poly "all but dissertation" for completing the Ph.D. that was required by the end of October of our second tenure-track year. Failing to finish our terminal degree meant that we wouldn't be appointed to a third year. So after a full day's teaching, we would hole up in our offices to work on our dissertations. The Poly bread and cheese

kept us going until the wee hours of the morning.

In the fall of 1972, Cal Poly changed its name from "California State Polytechnic College" to "California Polytechnic State University." At first this seemed to be only a cosmetic change. President Kennedy continued to use terms like "emphasized areas" and "occupational training on a college level" in describing our mission. I

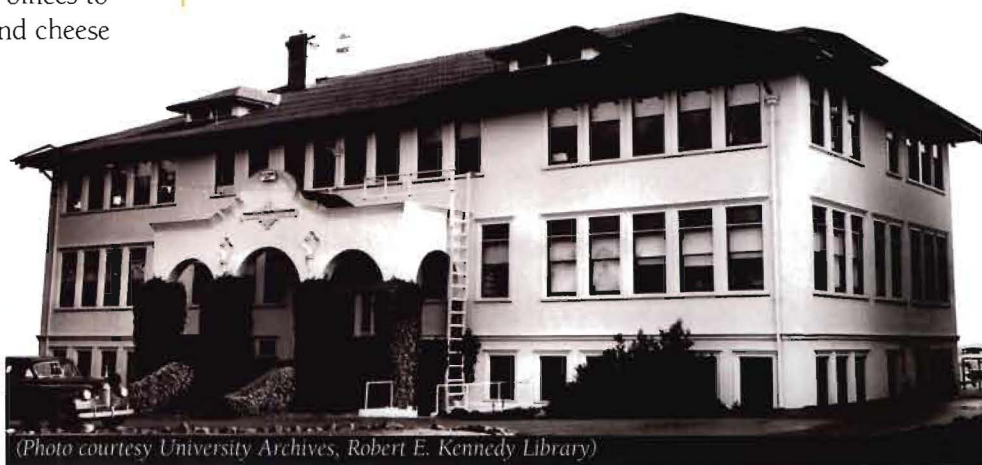
am convinced that he did so to protect Cal Poly's unique position among the CSU campuses. On university-wide committees however, there was a sense that this charge was evolving into educating California's best public university students.

There was a great deal of anxiety about how the best of Poly's traditions might be retained in this

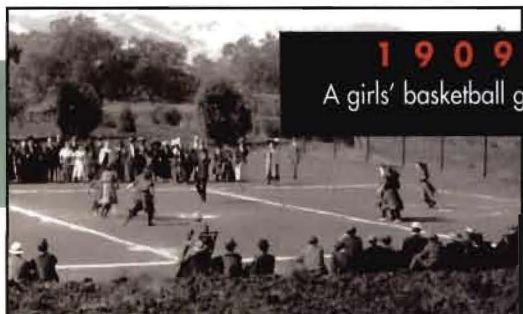
process. The task would require costly new infrastructure for technology beyond the applied levels of production agriculture and engineering, and gaining state funding for buildings and labs had always been difficult. It was especially so during the "stagflation" years of the early 1970s.

THROUGH A GROWING
REPUTATION FOR EXCELLENCE
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(PRESIDENT) KENNEDY, CAL POLY
WAS ABLE TO GROW ITS
INFRASTRUCTURE (IN THE 1970s).

Cal Poly's original agricultural education building, designed by renowned architect William Weeks, was razed in 1973 to make way for a new architecture building.



(Photo courtesy University Archives, Robert E. Kennedy Library)



1909
A girls' basketball game



1910
Students making and packing butter



1912
Farmers' Picnic broadside

The task was further complicated by the election of Jerry Brown as governor in 1974. As governor, Brown preached the policies of "small is beautiful" and "an era of limits."

The campus desperately needed a new library. The 1940s-era Dexter Library was hopelessly overcrowded. A congressman once complained to me that he had gotten Cal Poly's library designated as a national depository for books acquired by the Library of Congress, but by 1972 the library was returning some of those books for lack of room. Nor was there room for students to study. Visitors from the Chancellor's Office would be ushered through the library to witness the impossibly crowded conditions.

Nevertheless, through a growing reputation for excellence and superb lobbying by Kennedy, Cal Poly was able to grow its infrastructure during the Jerry Brown years, and in 1981, two years after Kennedy's retirement, the new Robert E. Kennedy Library was dedicated in his name.

In the spring of 1978, the Jarvis-Gann Tax Initiative took California by storm. Proposition 13 on the June statewide ballot revolutionized tax relationships in California. The major portion of the cost of K-12 education was passed from local districts to the state office of education. This put an immediate freeze on most state projects and did not augur well for the CSU system.

On Feb. 1, 1979, Kennedy announced his retirement. The search for a new president began.

During the winter of 1972, Chancellor Glen S. Dumke, a prominent California historian, had visited the Poly campus and given an hour-long talk on its history. He intimated that at the time of Julian McPhee's

retirement and death (1966-67) there had been much consternation among the trustees over McPhee's replacement. Kennedy was viewed as someone who knew McPhee's ways of doing things and would not initiate major changes too rapidly.

With Kennedy's retirement, a nationwide search would in all likelihood bring someone from outside the CSU system to campus. The search soon centered on Warren J. Baker, vice president for academic affairs at the University of Detroit. Baker had a distinguished record as a researcher and had held a visiting research position at M.I.T.

When Baker's selection was announced, several of my colleagues in the schools of agriculture and engineering spoke of their fears that he would turn Poly into a research campus. For some,

his being invited to join the National Science Foundation by President Ronald Reagan confirmed these fears.

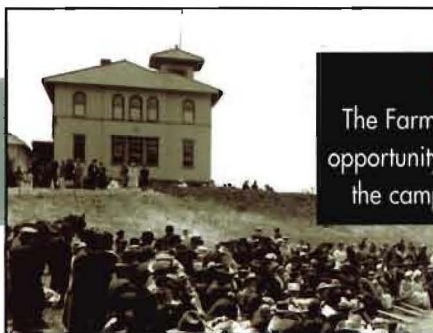
Instead, President Baker has led the campus down a path which has retained and enhanced the university's "hands-on" approach to education.

President Baker's use of the President's Cabinet to generate support in Sacramento and the private sector has brought much-needed infrastructure and program support to Cal Poly.

His promotion of applied research and a curriculum which provides intellectual stimulation over a broad spectrum has elevated our campus to one of the finest undergraduate institutions in the world. I was a member of the Academic Senate's research and grants committee throughout the 1990s. In that capacity I had the pleasure of observing the building of curriculum

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1912

The Farmers' Picnics provide an opportunity for early visitors to tour the campus and hear lectures.



1917

Yearbook picture of Class of 1917

The Poly Way *continued from page 7*

and infrastructure ranging from the creation of new majors in music, philosophy, and drama, and programs in wine and viticulture, environmental design, integrative technology, and biotechnology, to the construction of the Dairy Products Technology Center, the Poultry Science Instructional Center, the Advanced Technology Laboratories (built with support from the National Science Foundation and the Keck Foundation), the Christopher Cohan Center (built in conjunction with the city of San Luis Obispo and the Foundation for the Performing Arts Center), and a new campus communication, electrical, and heating system.

Major gifts during President Baker's tenure have included the 3,200-acre Swanton Pacific Ranch near Santa Cruz, bequeathed by alumnus Al Smith (CRSC '44, AGRI '56) to the College of Agriculture in 1993 as a living laboratory that provides students with hands-on instruction in agriculture and environmental education. Smith also established an endowment to support educational programs at Swanton Pacific and in the College of

Agriculture—an endowment valued today at more than \$17 million. In November 2000 the Orfalea College of Business became the first named college at Cal Poly in

recognition of the Paul J. Orfalea family gift of \$15 million, one of the largest individual gifts of cash or securities ever recorded in the 23-campus CSU system.

Cal Poly still has to resolve difficulties ranging from availability of classrooms and electronic learning environments to student and faculty housing and the (national) problem of student alcohol abuse. The master plan submitted in the spring of 2001 addresses many of these issues.

During my 30 years at Cal Poly, four things have

kept me going: my commitment to my family; my sense that I had colleagues who were working equally hard; my love of studying and teaching a subject which embraces all human activity; and the enthusiasm that I immediately picked up from the students.

I'm still not sure what "the Poly way" is, but by now I must be a part of it. Our unique university is a wonderful place to have spent half a lifetime.



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NEW SUBMISSION MODE FOR "CLASS NOTES" AND "IN MEMORIAMs"

Because of the large numbers of "Class Notes" and "In Memoriams" we receive for each issue of the *Cal Poly Magazine*, both these items from readers will now be run on the Cal Poly Alumni Association Web site at www.alumni.calpoly.edu.

Please mail "Class Notes" and "In Memoriam" information to the Alumni Relations Office, c/o Jen Landers, Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, CA 93407, or e-mail jlanders@calpoly.edu.

For "Class Notes" include your name (first, last [maiden]), major, graduation year or years attended, address, phone number, and employer/position.

For "In Memoriams" please follow the format used in earlier issues of *Cal Poly Magazine*.

The Cal Poly Alumni Association reserves the right to edit content and does not print or return unsolicited photos. All items become Cal Poly property for the purpose of Web publication.