

After awful life, Totem Teddy lives on

by Dave Carter

Rising stately above the confusion of passing students at the University Center stands a proud, but obscure mascot of the school, Totem Teddy.

Teddy is the totem pole in the UC, and his rich brown and blue coat camouflage the scars of his near fatal experiences.

Exactly when Teddy came to UNC from Alaska remains a mystery. He was

given to the school by an alumnus between 1908 and 1921, depending on which Teddy expert is correct.

In his early days here, Teddy stood vigil at the northwest corner of Cranford Hall, the original building on campus.

As the years passed, Teddy became accepted as a mascot and was frequently assaulted by the school's rivals, Colorado Aggies (at Fort Collins) and Colorado School of Mines.

"He was tarred and feathered once," recalled Harold M. Browning, assistant building and grounds manager, who remembers Totem Teddy since coming to UNC in 1933.

Dr. William Ross, former president of UNC, said he remembered once when students brought a winch or hoist from Fort Collins, pulled Teddy from the top of his totem pole, and hauled him away. Chuckling, Ross added, "They got scared and called us in a couple of days to come over and get it."

Mother Nature also had her grudges against Teddy, according to Ross. Woodpeckers caused heavy damage in 1942, Ross said, and termites also pitched in to help ravage the totem pole.

The stout mascot refused to surrender, but was moved to a new location between Gray Hall and Gunter Gymnasium. The near fatal incidents occurred here. He was set ablaze once, but survived, only to face worse vandalism.

One night, while being sawed in half by a rival school, Teddy fell to the ground, and broke into several pieces. This proved too much for even the rugged bear, and he humbly retired to the physical plant building.

Teddy disappeared completely from the college

scene, except for a concrete likeness that was made and placed in the library reading room. For a while it seemed he might never return.

But, in 1962 students didn't have any petitions to impeach the President or stop a war, so they drew up a petition to bring back Totem Teddy. Teddy must have been popular, because 1,252 signatures were on that petition.

"It took a lot of work," said Browning, who helped nurse Teddy back to health. "The ears and nose were pretty badly damaged."

According to Browning, most of the repairs were made with putty, and care was taken to match the

paint with Teddy's original color.

Meanwhile, controversy arose as to where Totem Teddy should be placed when repaired. Gunter, Carter and Cranford Halls were all considered for the honor, but Dr. Ross, then president of the university, picked a better location.

"When the new University Center was being built I asked the architects to build one area two stories high for Totem Teddy," Ross said.

His wishes were carried out, and today Totem Teddy seems very much at home in his present surroundings.