PROLOGUE

The George Cross Statue
Stands Sentinel on Parrington Oval

There always has been something comforting about the massive limestone statue of William Bennett Bizzell silently watching over the library that bears his name. More than half a century after the University's fifth president set aside the burdens of his office, he is still a presence on the campus, retaining a personal relationship with the generations of Sooner students who never knew him.

He certainly has contributed to their creativity. One night a set of giant footprints mysteriously appeared at the base of the statue, leading through the library into the men's restroom and back again. After a big snow a few years ago, students built a companion snowman and labeled him "Bizzell Jr." In another thoughtful gesture, a student affairs staffer knitted Bizzell Sr. a holiday stocking cap and muffler, size large, the donning of which became the preamble to the annual tree lighting festivities.

The Carl Albert Statue in front of Oklahoma Memorial Union received similar consideration from an unknown source this semester. Apparently worried about the harmful side effects of the Union's reconstruction activities, some considerate soul draped the Speaker's sculpted face with a dust mask. Notwithstanding the occasional indignity suffered by Law Dean Julian Monnet's likeness (allegedly at the hands of Sooner engineers), we do cherish our statues.

Small wonder, therefore, that one of the campus' most revered figures, President Emeritus George Lynn Cross, has been immortalized in bronze on Parrington Oval, north of Evans Hall. I like having him there. Santa Fe sculptor Paul Moore did such a wonderful job of capturing his commanding presence, his strength and humanity; you almost expect to hear those deep measured tones coming forth with a typically wry comment, calming frustrations, putting concerns into perspective.

Approximately 1,000 Cross admirers gathered this spring for the dedication. The May day could not have been more beautiful; the landscape department had worked its magic on the oval; the mood was jubilant. The dignitaries in attendance contributed light-hearted commentary combining just the right amount of praise with good humor.

David Boren, a law alumnus of the Cross era, acknowledged OU's seventh chief executive as his own presidential role model. He characterized the monument as an enduring reminder of our obligations, a guide to our future actions, a covenant between generations.

Board of Regents Chair G. T. Blankenship recalled a 25-year presidency that successfully met the challenges of burgeoning enrollments, returning W.W. II veterans, academic freedom, racial integration, campus expansion, a massive building program and the arrival of big-time football. To Blankenship, who initiated the statue project and secured its private funding, fell the honor of unveiling the 8-foot figure mounted atop a six-foot base of Wapanucka limestone.

The sight brought the spectators forward to admire Paul Moore's artistry, exchange George Cross stories, read the quotations from his speeches posted on either side of the monument. Chiseling Cross' words into the limestone is the summer task of stonemason Patrick Dennis, an OU landscape department employee who also built the base.

We had a very good time, but best of all, this was an event that the honoree could enjoy. The real George Cross stood at the lectern, erect and courtly at 91, compelled by the occasion, he said, to speak in public one more time. It was the Cross we remember—humorous, generous and kind but brief and to-the-point.

The only element missing from this occasion was the incomparable Cleo Cross, whose health kept her from seeing the bronze Paul Moore plaque bearing her profile mounted on the statue's base. With all his accomplishments, the president emeritus insists that marrying Cleo "was the best thing I ever did," and who is bold enough to disagree with George Cross?

On commencement Saturday, just a few days after the dedication, the stony visaged W.B. Bizzell found that he had competition as the photo site of choice for departing graduates and their families. I doubt he minded. In fact, he probably is passing along the name of that lady who knits the caps and mufflers. It can get cold in Oklahoma.

—CJB