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## Chain of Command

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“I chose to wear the medallion because it’s part of the pomp and circumstance at college ceremonies around the world — and we had a medallion, after all.”

—Thomas L. Hellie

# Chain of command

The on-again, off-again history of a Linfield symbol

By Kathy Foss

**A**t the first full Linfield University Commencement in May, there were a number of changes from the previous generation of Linfield College graduations. An updated stage was set among the oak trees, large banners called gonfalons bearing the names of the three main academic units marked the entrance of the graduates, and academic deans handed out diplomas for each school or college. But even the keenest observer may not have noticed every change. One, at least, was only 3 inches in diameter.

This year’s ceremony marked the introduction of Linfield’s new presidential medallion, a symbol of the president’s office worn during formal occasions. While the process of updating the medallion with the new university seal was relatively straightforward, its place in Linfield history is not.

Linfield’s presidential medallion was first created for President Gordon Bjork’s inauguration on June 1, 1969. Such medallions trace their history back to livery collars, or chains of office, worn in the Middle Ages noting the rank and responsibility of a monarch or state official. They have long been used in higher education as a symbol of the trust and authority invested in a president by university stakeholders.

Bruce Huffman, former director of public affairs, spearheaded the creation of Linfield’s medallion. Huffman led Bjork’s inauguration committee, along with trustee Glen Macy and professor J.A. Jonasson.

“An alumnus suggested that Linfield College should have a presidential medallion for the inauguration,” Huffman later told Bruce Wyatt, then vice president for college relations, in 2007. “An artist was found, he did the job and presented the medallion to the college as a gift. As no records were left of the work, both the alumnus and the artist are unknown.”

Bjork remembers wearing the medallion at “inauguration and subsequent ceremonial events like convocation, graduation, etc.” throughout his presidency. But, the end of Bjork’s tenure in 1974 was almost the end of the new symbol.

## A symbol disappears

When Charles Walker became president in 1975, he did not have an inauguration. In “Inspired Pragmatism,” author Marvin Henberg wrote that “Walker concluded that any such celebration should wait until ‘the accumulated deficit is eradicated.’ Installed

without fanfare, he rolled up his sleeves and set to work.”

When asked recently about the medallion, Walker said, “Vaguely, I remember there was a medallion. But at the time, it didn’t yet feel appropriate to wear it.”

There is no evidence that Walker wore the medallion during any formal event in his presidency. And so, this new symbol of the Linfield president sat in its jewelry box unused for Walker’s 17 years in office.

Walker’s successor, Vivian Bull, took office in 1992. Meeting minutes from Bull’s inauguration planning committee specifically note that “a passing of symbolic item not desired unless copy of charges or charter” at the May 1993 event.

Subsequent photographs of Bull dressed in her regalia at formal events do not show her wearing the medallion during her 13-year tenure.

## A tradition is resurrected

After more than three decades sitting dormant in the president’s office, the medallion emerged once again at the investiture of President Thomas L. Hellie on March 2, 2007.

It was draped around his neck following these words: “I, Glenna Kruger, chair of the board of trustees, formally recognize you Thomas L. Hellie, as president of Linfield College by presenting the medallion of office to you.”

Hellie would be pictured wearing the president’s medallion throughout his presidency at formal events.

“I chose to wear the medallion because it’s part of the pomp and circumstance at college ceremonies around the world — and we had a medallion, after all,” Hellie recently reminisced.

In 2010, Linfield created a new college logo and seal as part of a rebranding effort, and the resurrected symbol of the university was replaced with a new medallion bearing the updated seal. The original medallion, having been in existence for 41 years and used for less than 10, was retired to the university archives. The updated medallion was then presented to President Miles K. Davis at his investiture in 2019.

The move from Linfield College to Linfield University in 2020 resulted in another new seal, and therefore, the new medallion worn by President Davis at this year’s Commencement.

To honor the history of the medallion, the full collection is now on display in the President’s Office in Melrose Hall.