

Keeping posterity in mind

Jeanne Pimentel is a woman with a mission. Her goal is to make the papers of her late husband, the College of Chemistry's beloved professor George Pimentel, accessible to the public. She can often be found at UC Berkeley's Bancroft library, where she works several hours each week with Teri Doizaki, George's administrative assistant in the early 1960s (who later worked as the Department of Chemistry's Management Services Officer) and

CHEM STUDY project to improve high school chemistry education, and for his outstanding teaching to thousands of freshman chemistry students.

George died in 1989 after a 40-year career at the college. Upon his death the Bancroft library, home to the campus's archives and rare book collections, requested his papers. The contents of George's office were placed in 138 acid-free cartons and stored by the Bancroft.

While the library had originally intended to process the papers quickly, budget cuts in the 1990s left them unable to begin. "Each one-cubic-foot carton can hold up to 2,500 pieces of paper," says Farrell, "and it costs \$500–\$600 per carton to process documents."

The Pimentel papers languished until 1996, when Laurel Kirkland, a geophysics grad student studying the spectroscopy of Mars at Houston's NASA-funded Lunar and Planetary Institute, discovered them and realized their importance.

In 1969, the Mariner 6 and 7 spacecraft had flown to Mars and analyzed its features using an infrared spectrometer designed by Pimentel and grad student Ken Herr and built at UC Berkeley.

Jeanne helped Kirkland find a prototype of the instrument and the original data tapes, buried deep in storage. By digging into the Pimentel documents at the Bancroft library, Kirkland also found valuable unpublished data and papers about the mission.

"It would be a sin not to make the papers accessible to the public," says Jeanne. In 2005 she began her mission to process the papers. Her strategy has been two-pronged: she is working with Doizaki and Jessie Herr to edit the size of the collection, and she has also enlisted the college's help with fundraising to defray the cost of the processing.

In these fundraising efforts, Jeanne has been joined by two allies—former UC president Richard Atkinson and Nobel Laureate Mario Molina. George served as Deputy Director with Atkinson, then the

Director of the National Science Foundation in Washington, D.C., from 1977–80. Molina earned his Ph.D. with Pimentel in 1975 and remembers him as "an excellent teacher and a wonderful mentor; his warmth, enthusiasm, and encouragement provided me with inspiration to pursue important scientific questions."

Making generous commitments themselves, Atkinson and Molina have written to Pimentel's students and colleagues, informing them of the value of the collection and asking for their financial support for the archiving project and the Pimentel award (see sidebar on page 7).

Once the papers are processed, the index, or "finding aid," will be available on the Internet through UC's Online Archive of California (<http://oac.cdlib.org/>). The Bancroft History of Science and Technology Collection includes the papers of College of Chemistry professors Melvin Calvin, Harold Johnston, Y. T. Lee, G. N. Lewis, Henry Rapoport, Kenneth Pitzer, and Charles Wilke, among others.

For Jeanne Pimentel, the project is a bittersweet reminder of the past. "George was a wonderful writer, and even the most mundane correspondence often contains one of his wry comments," says Jeanne. "It makes me realize that even after all these years, I still miss him." She is not alone. (For more on Pimentel, see the website Jeanne maintains at www.georgepimentel.com.)



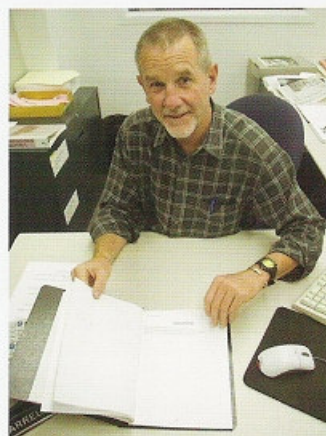
At the Bancroft library, Teri Doizaki and Jeanne Pimentel examine a document from the papers of George Pimentel. Jeanne is sorting the papers of her late husband to assist the Bancroft archivists.

with Jessie Herr, who earned her Ph.D. with George in 1975. Together they sort the papers, eliminate duplicate copies, remove material that belongs in other archives, and use their knowledge of George's career to prepare the papers for processing by a professional archivist.

"Jeanne's efforts will save us \$10,000 to \$20,000 in early sorting," says campus archivist David Farrell.

George Pimentel had a remarkable career that included a brief stint during World War II at Berkeley working on the Manhattan Project, which he abandoned in favor of joining the Navy as a submariner. Following the war, Pimentel returned to Berkeley, completed his Ph.D. with Kenneth S. Pitzer and joined the faculty in 1949. He received many honors for his work on chemical lasers and high-speed infrared spectroscopy, including Israel's Wolf Prize, the National Medal of Science, the Welch Award, the Priestley Medal and the Berkeley Citation.

He was equally well known for his



Bancroft archivist David Farrell displays the finding aid for the papers of Henry Rapoport. When the Pimentel papers have been processed, the finding aid also will be available on the Internet.