

Historically Speaking

Kelly Fowler Nylund, *Virginia Tech*, Fraternity History Chair

May 2016

Can you tell me about the history of our badge?

“The Greek letter boys cheered and stamped” as six young ladies marched into Monmouth College chapel on October 13, 1870, proudly wearing the first golden keys of Kappa Kappa Gamma, thus announcing the formation of their Fraternity. The *Monmouth College Courier* commented that October: “They wear a little golden key, sometimes on their foreheads, sometimes on their little blue or red jackets, which much become them. It has three letters on it, K K Γ and also ΑΩΩ. We have been able to count only six of them.”

The adoption of Kappa Kappa Gamma’s membership badge was one of the first acts of the Founders. In fact, the new group was not announced until October 13, 1870, for the young students were awaiting the arrival of their new pins. Since then, nearly everything about the badge has changed with two exceptions – it is still golden and it is still shaped like a key.

The stories vary relating to Kappa’s early history, including the details surrounding the badge. According to Founders Lou Stevenson and Anna Willits, Anna Willits’ mother suggested “A key to lock your secrets up.” Regardless of the original suggestion, these first members intended the opposite. As students of classical studies, with an interest in the arts, they devoted their meetings to literature and debate. They actually chose the key to “unlock the hidden mysteries in Science, Literature and Art.”

The first keys were long (almost twice the length of current badges), flat, handmade pins, but were not heavy. Lou Bennett’s family jeweler in Pittsburgh, John Stevenson, made the pins. The Alpha members first wore them, at least on dress occasions, in their hair. Next, the pin was worn as a brooch, and retained its length for easy clasping at the collar.



1870 badge of Anna Willits Pattee, *Monmouth*

In 1870, the Constitution stated that the Treasurer would have the duty to “procure badges,” and it was the duty of the members to keep them. However, a description of the badge was not included. By 1873, the Constitution had a description of the badge, but no specific instructions on when or how to wear it. Also in 1873, Epsilon Chapter questioned the size of the badge, suggesting a change to half the size. Alpha replied: “The badge cannot be changed in any way and must be secured from the contracting firm in the East.”

The Constitution of 1876 had more details, specifying black enamel for letters and requiring the engraving of the owner’s name and chapter on the back of the badge. Some members at this time were having their names

engraved on the front over the ward (the square shaped end above ΑΩΟ), while others did not have their names put on the pin at all.

By 1877, Mr. Brattin of Greencastle, Indiana, and Mr. McIntosh, of Indianapolis, began making Kappa pins. An advertisement in the December 1882 issue of the *Golden Key* shows that Kappa pins were available from Bingham, Walz and Mayhew, an 'authorized' jeweler in Indianapolis, Indiana, and by 1884, J.F. Newman, New York City, began service to Kappa as an official jeweler. Newman would be an official Kappa jeweler for more than fifty years. Through the years, the number and names of official Fraternity jewelers changed until 1948 when Burr, Patterson and Auld was selected as the only official jeweler. Burr, Patterson and Auld was acquired in 2004 by Herff Jones, our current jeweler.



1883 badge of Mary Warren Ayars, *Boston*

During Kappa's first decades the size and jeweling of the badge followed personal preference. During the 1880's, the width through the center of the badge increased and jewels began to appear more often. The 1890's brought smaller keys, some only three-fourths of an inch long, worn slightly on the bias. However, in 1896, after discussion in *The Key* and at Convention, the length of our badge was standardized at one inch.



1896 badge of Alice Clark Smith, *Minnesota*

A 1908 General Convention vote added a Custodian of the Badge position for the protection of the badge. The Custodian perfected an order form and system to order badges. She received all badge orders, then countersigned and recorded each order. These orders were then forwarded to the official jeweler. There were three Custodians of the Badge, George Challoner (Tracy), *Wisconsin*, Cleora Wheeler, *Minnesota*, and May C. Whiting (Westermann), *Nebraska*. In 1922, this responsibility was moved to the Central Office (Fraternity Headquarters).

During the next decade, more slender badges became popular, and between 1918 and 1920 more than half the keys ordered were of the slender outline. The 1924 Convention specified the "slender model, plain Roman finish, raised polished gold letters, plain background; jeweling, if wished, to be 15 pearls crownset: one on the handle and three at the top of the ward."



1923 badge of Lorena Mack Crosby, *Kansas*

Originally, pearls were the only jewels authorized, but by vote at the 1930 Convention, diamond and sapphires, alone or in combination, were also permitted. External events, such as World Wars I and II, when jewels were hard to obtain, or cost prohibitive, sometimes influenced the choices. Gold content was greatly reduced as well.



1932 badge of Betty Mathias Soderstrom, *Illinois*

Things steadied in later years, and the 1974 the Fraternity *Bylaws* stated simply that the badge of the Fraternity is a golden key one inch in length, plain or jeweled (pearls, sapphires or diamonds), with ΚΚΓ on the stem and ΑΩΟ on the ward. It is worn strictly as an emblem of membership by persons duly initiated. The combination of letters ΚΚΓ is registered with the U.S. Patent Office, and the badge may be secured only from firms authorized by the Fraternity Council and only upon the presentation of an official badge order issued by Fraternity Headquarters.



Example of a modern day badge

Burr, Patterson and Auld was acquired by Herff Jones in 2004 and remains the official jeweler of Kappa Kappa Gamma. In recent years, a badge with light blue and dark blue alternating stones was added to Kappa Kappa Gamma's badge choices.

Resource materials used:

History of Kappa Kappa Gamma Fraternity, 1870-1930

The History of Kappa Kappa Gamma, vols. I & II, 1870-1976

History 2000, Kappa Kappa Gamma Through the Years

History books can be found on Kappapedia: http://wiki.kkg.org/pages/History_Books