

Would you please tell me about the first months of the Fraternity? With a tiny acorn, the early members of Alpha Chapter planted the mighty oak tree that is today Kappa Kappa Gamma. While most of the records from those initial months of the Fraternity have been lost, we are fortunate to have letters and reminiscences from some of the first women who wore the key. In celebration of our 139 years, it seems only fitting to let the story of our beginning be told as much as possible in their words. This material is taken from *The History of Kappa Kappa Gamma 1870-1932* and *The Key of Kappa Kappa Gamma, Vol. 101, No. 3, Fall 1984, Pages 24-25.*

The year was 1870: the country was recovering from the Reconstruction Era following the Civil War, the women's movement was underway and change was in the air. It was then possible for women to attend institutions of higher learning, although Phi Beta Kappa would not consider female members. The bathtub had just been declared unhealthy by the Boston Medical Society.

Monmouth College founding and campus: A fully accredited coeducational college chartered in February 1857, open to women since its beginnings; only school of the United Presbyterian Church. One building, 10 faculty members, approximately 99 students, 26 women, no out-of-state women students. Tuition: \$10 per term. No dormitories: all students lived with local families in "approved Christian homes."

Curriculum: 10 required courses in religion. Two programs of study: a three-year scientific course and a four-year classical course.

Social Life: By 1870, 194 students attended Monmouth College; 61 were women. For men, quite a few Greek fraternities (Beta Theta Pi, Delta Tau Delta and Phi Gamma Delta). For women, only I.C., L.M. and literary societies. One of the big community events of interest to the Monmouth women students was when suffragette Elizabeth Cady Stanton visited town and spoke on the women's movement. It is highly possible that from her visit to Monmouth the kernel of the Kappa acorn began to take form.¹

Pow-Wow 1869-1870: "Sometime during '69-'70, Minnie Stewart, Jennie Boyd and I (Lou Bennett) met for a 'pow-wow' and concluded we would have something new. The world seemed to be moving too slowly. We determined that nothing short of a Greek-letter fraternity would satisfy us. We three then admitted Anna Willits to our solemn councils."

Spring 1870: "We four decided on our form of organization, the motto and our pins. We wanted those particular letters. We added Sue Walker to the original membership." "Minnie Stewart and Sue Walker put my hand on the Bible, and I (Lou Stevenson) took an oath to stand by whatever was started."

Charter: "Minnie Stewart, Jennie Boyd, Lou Bennett and Anna Willits went up to the Stewart home and signed the charter. Four was enough. Sue Walker did not sign—her mother was having a dinner party, and she had to go home to help. Lou Stevenson went to let Anna's father know where she was and so did not sign."

First Formal Meeting 1870: "The first formal meeting of the Fraternity was held in the spring of 1870 at Sue Walker's home. Minnie Stewart was our president and Jennie Boyd, our scribe. We decided, as the table was high and Jennie would write, that she should have the tall chair. The reason for the first business meeting was that the jeweler had written us that we had to take 12 keys. But since there were other girls whom we wanted for Kappas, we decided to increase our membership at once."

Summer 1870: "This business of starting a fraternity was a serious matter, and there were necessarily many delays. It was several months before things were finally straightened out."²

Badge: A flat, long, gold key with the Greek letters ΚΚΓ and ΑΩΟ, handmade by a Pittsburgh jeweler. Cost: \$5 each. No other emblems, insignia or symbols.

First Public Appearance October 13, 1870: "Our pins arrived! We publicly wore our pins to chapel, hanging back so we must go well up in front and the others were seated. The Greek-letter boys cheered and stamped, and we were seated quite awhile

before they quieted down. There was great curiosity. We were so excited and proud! Everything seemed different! We had started something all by ourselves!”

First Initiation October 1870: “Our first initiation service was very simple—the constitution was read and promises of loyalty were made. No Ritual whatsoever! I (Lou Bennett) distinctly remember the anxiety of the first initiates to be put in possession of the secrets of the order, which was rather embarrassing to the charter members, as we had not then accumulated much of a stock.”

Chapter Meetings: “Our meetings were held at the members’ homes, and we never attained to the dignity of a society hall.” At chapter meetings, it was required to have literary programs: recitation, oration, reading aloud, debate and critique. Minnie Stewart and Lou Bennett were highly successful in campus literary society debates. But “we were a lively lot of girls with good backing who wanted something different and got it. We made haste to make good as quickly as possible.”

Music: The founding of Kappa meant it needed many things. “The new fraternities all had their own music so we paid \$50 to have a Kappa Kappa Gamma Waltz published and dedicated to us.³ The first Kappas were very poor singers.”

Rush (Recruitment): A candidate for membership was “one who is or has been an attendant at some college or seminary” and a “lady of good moral character.”

Pledging January and September 1871: “I (Alice Pillsbury) was a ‘pledge’ for about the space of five minutes as I was immediately taken to the ‘Greek’ room and initiated. We were just a happy, harmonious group of lively girls with a keen sense of loyalty to Kappa and to each other with strict regard to the quality of membership and sacredness of our badge.”

Extension Winter 1871: “After a few months existence as a society, it occurred to us that we ought to be letting our light shine, so the ‘A’ chapter deputized Minnie Stewart and Lou Bennett to go to Knoxville, Ill., to organize a chapter at St. Mary’s School.”

Grand Chapter 1871: With the establishment of “B” Chapter (Beta at St. Mary’s School), Alpha, which consisted of a dozen members, became the chief executive body of Kappa Kappa Gamma and as such wrote the first bylaws and Ritual. In addition to Beta Chapter, Alpha authorized the charters for eight additional chapters: Gamma at Smithson College, Delta at Indiana University, Epsilon at Illinois Wesleyan, Eta at the University of Wisconsin, Iota at DePauw, Theta at the University of Missouri, Gamma 2 at Wooster College and Zeta at Rockford Female Seminary. A charter was one dollar and the initiation fee was also one dollar. The Grand Chapter form of government continued to serve KKG as both council officers and headquarters until the 1882 Convention.

First Social October 31, 1871: “This was the Halloween midnight supper, and it exceeded our expectations. When ushered into the dining room, the table was set with exquisite linen and silver. Every alternate place was left vacant for our expected ghostly visitors. A creepy feeling prevailed. We put out all the lights and opened the two outside doors. Without our knowledge, a boy had been invited for each girl and instructed to come into the house dressed in costume to take his place around the table. The white bulldog chained in the barn broke loose and caused much discomfort to the costume-attired boys. When the lights came on, three of the brave Kappas were found under the table! A delicious supper completed our happiness.”

1. Information about Monmouth College in 1870 was researched by Professor Mary B. Crow, *Monmouth*, Department of History, and Jeff Rankin, Director of College Communications, Monmouth College.

2. The first members of Alpha Chapter thought that they were establishing “the first Greek-letter society for girls.” They did not know that Kappa Alpha Theta had been founded in January 1870 at DePauw University in Greencastle, Ind. I.C., founded at Monmouth in 1867, did not become Pi Beta Phi until 1888.

3. The copyright for the Kappa Waltz is dated 1873. However, the composer, S.H. Price, was a member of the music faculty of Monmouth College in 1870 and, like other faculty members and the families of the early chapter members, assisted Alpha in untold ways. It is more than probable that Mr. Price was approached quite early in Alpha’s history to compose a piece of music. We do know two major concerns of Alpha during its first months were starting other chapters and getting some music. A copy of the Kappa Waltz is available from the Archivist at Fraternity Headquarters.