

# *Historically Speaking*.....

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## **Pioneering the path of Equity in Academic Excellence**

Every Founders Day, members of Kappa Kappa Gamma celebrate the women who boldly marched into chapel wearing gold keys in their hair and provided us with our Fraternity name, badge, colors and much more. We take pride in their courage and desire to provide a fraternal structure for women, just like the men. Although their vision established an organization that has persevered for 142 years, what is truly astounding is the role Monmouth College and our Founders played in creating an equitable educational field that promoted intellectual development for women in the 1870s.

Following the Civil War, there were several societal changes that contributed to the demand for higher education for women. The public school system grew and provided girls a place of learning, as well as increased the demand for teachers. Women were viewed as excellent teachers, so in turn; higher education for women became more acceptable and necessary. During this period of time, the gas light was invented, which allowed women to read in the evening. The industrial revolution soon followed and our country was introduced to the stove, sewing machine and other inventions that increased leisure time for women, since they no longer needed to spend 100 percent of their time on domestic tasks. As women became more educated through their reading and schooling, it became increasingly apparent that higher education would better prepare them for the increasing demands of employment opportunities.

Monmouth College was founded in April of 1853 as one of the first educational institutions in the country to admit women from its inception. Unlike other educational institutions of the time, where women took courses that were less rigorous than that of the men, women at Monmouth took courses that were of equal rigor and held the same requirements as men. Some historians say that the women's fraternal movement, which was modeled after the Greek-letter fraternities of men, was led by Monmouth's equitable treatment of women. Pi Beta Phi, founded in April of 1867 as I. C. Sorosis, and Kappa Kappa Gamma, founded in October of 1870, both hail from Monmouth College.

In 1870 only 0.7 percent of the female population went to college. Yet, three of our six Founders not only graduated from Monmouth College but also went on to earn Masters Degrees. Hannah Jeanette (Jennie) Boyd received her Master's Degree and went on to have a 30-year teaching career. Mary Louise (Lou) Bennett obtained her Master's Degree and worked as a proofreader and editor first in Omaha, where she assisted her husband with the publication, *The Christian Hour*, and later in Los Angeles, California, where she worked for Baumgart Publishing Company. Anna Elizabeth Willits received a master's degree from Monmouth and served as a leader in many community organizations, including serving on the Monmouth Board of Education. Martha Louisa (Lou) Stevenson received her Bachelor's Degree from Monmouth College and moved with her husband, William Oliver Miller, to Missouri where he founded Tarkio College. Susan Burley Walker and Lou Bennett became pastors' wives and Mary (Minnie) Moore Stewart taught public school in Monmouth and later became a high school principal in Florida.

The visionary beliefs of Monmouth College combined with the extraordinary intellect and tenacity of our Founders created a perfect storm, which enabled women to strive for academic excellence and begin the path toward equality with men. Today, as we celebrate the 142<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the founding of Kappa Kappa Gamma, we can proudly look back on how Kappas and women everywhere have been positively impacted by these amazing women.

Some information based on research by Julie Martin Mangis, *George Washington*