

Phi *Beta* **AT HUNTER** 1919-1969 *Kappa*

1. The Phi Beta Kappa Society

Phi Beta Kappa was founded by a group of students at the College of William and Mary, in Williamsburg, Virginia. The exact date of the first meeting is recorded, December 5, 1776.

The new student society flourished at William and Mary for four years. When the battle lines of the Revolutionary War were drawn to the South the College was closed, and the Society became inactive. There is record of the service of members in the Revolution.

But the Society had insured its continued existence in the North. At their third anniversary meeting at William and Mary, in 1779, the members of Phi Beta Kappa had voted to grant charters for branches, later to be known as chapters, at Yale and Harvard. The third chapter in the North, at Dartmouth, was chartered by the Harvard Phi Beta Kappa members, with the consent of Yale's.

In the first century of the Society's history, twenty-five colleges were granted charters for chapters; the first chapter at William and Mary had been revived. In 1883 all the chapters joined to form a federal union, the National Council of United Chapters. Since that time charters for new chapters have been granted at the triennial meetings of the United Chapters. Delegates from all the existing chapters attend, to vote on applications by colleges for new Phi Beta Kappa chapters and to conduct other business. There are today 184 chapters, in less than ten per cent of our colleges and universities.

The first chapter at a college for women, Vassar, was chartered in 1898, but women were first admitted to membership in Phi Beta Kappa in 1875, when the University of Vermont "found two women among its graduates qualified for admission" and elected them.

The initials designating the Society's name come from the Greek words *Philosophia Biou Kybernetes*, Love of Wisdom (is) the Guide of Life, the motto adopted by the student founders at William and Mary.

Their purpose was to cultivate "Friendship, Morality, Literature," or learning, and there were frequent meetings of the Society in the first years in Virginia. "Fraternal sentiments were fostered" and debates engaged in. The War was on. The young men debated "Whether anything is more dangerous to Civile Liberty than a standing army in times of Peace." They debated too "Whether a wise State Hath any Interest nearer at Heart than the Education of Youth."

Gradually, however, in Phi Beta Kappa chapters in the North, changes came about in the Society's purpose and program. At Harvard, Yale, and other northern chapters, membership in Phi Beta Kappa came to be regarded as an honor conferred in recognition of achievement, rather than as an opportunity to cultivate stimulating friendships and conduct discussions and debates in convivial meetings. For more than a century now, the determining criteria in the election of undergraduates to Phi Beta Kappa have been scholarship and good character.

As members of the various chapters who were no longer in college began to outnumber the undergraduate members, chapters arranged for annual reunions or anniversary meetings. On these occasions the scholarly objectives of Phi Beta Kappa were emphasized by the orators invited to address the chapter members. "The American Scholar," Emerson's address to the Harvard Phi Beta Kappa Chapter in 1837, is the most widely known of these orations. At the one hundredth anniversary celebration of the Phi Beta Kappa Chapter at Brown University in 1930, Charles Evans Hughes was the orator; excerpts from his address, still often read at Phi Beta Kappa initiation ceremonies, describe the abiding purpose and influence of the Society.

The unique position of Phi Beta Kappa, and its usefulness, can be safeguarded only by unremitting attention to what has become the law of its being. The prestige of the Fraternity is due to the fact that it is an association of men and women of scholarly attainments who have proved their merit according to the accepted

standards of college discipline. The best proof of the utility of the Fraternity is the esteem in which the election is held. Whatever may be the value of the various activities proposed for the organization, the essential thing is to hold to the theory of the Fraternity as a fellowship of scholars, admission to which is an honor conferred by reason of demonstrated worth. The success of Phi Beta Kappa continues to lie in what it is, rather than in what it does.

The particular interest of Phi Beta Kappa is in liberal education. Whatever debate there may be as to its exact definition, or its prerequisites, it persists as an ideal. Intensive critical study of educational aims and methods has found nothing to take its place. It means the development by careful training of the capacity to appreciate what has been done and thought, the ability to make worth-while appraisals of achievements, doctrines, theories, proposals. It is liberal because it emancipates; it signifies freedom from the tyranny of ignorance, and, what is worse, the dominion of folly. Learning is not its aim so much as intelligence served by learning.

At this time, when the world stands in need of every influence which favors intellectual discipline and achievement, as against a complacent indifference, the service of Phi Beta Kappa is of heightened value. It holds aloft the old banner of scholarship, and to the students who have turned aside from the easier paths and by their talent and fidelity have proved themselves to be worthy, it gives the fitting recognition of a special distinction. If it cannot be said that careers always fulfill the early promise, even by this test, in the main, Phi Beta Kappa has been justified by her children.

2. Nu Chapter Founded

Hunter College was granted a charter for a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa by the United Chapters on September 9, 1919. The chapter was formally installed the following winter, on February 11, 1920, in the week of the College's fiftieth anniversary celebration.

It was George Meason Whicher, chairman of the Department of Latin and Greek, who in 1915, after earlier faculty consideration, undertook the task of securing a Phi Beta Kappa charter for Hunter. He worked with a faculty committee, members like himself of Phi Beta

Kappa by election in the colleges in which they had earned their first degree.

The extant correspondence and records show clearly that Professor Whicher voluntarily bore the brunt of this faculty group's efforts. There are still in the files scores of letters addressed to him, from distinguished scholars in many colleges and universities, in reply to his letters and statements in which he had asked for support of Hunter's application for admission to Phi Beta Kappa. He sought to show that Hunter had become a liberal arts college of the first rank, well deserving of a Phi Beta Kappa charter. He prepared descriptive leaflets about the college, first in 1916, and later again in 1919.

For the first formal application for a charter was presented at the United Chapters' triennial meeting in 1916, but it was not approved. Apparently Hunter then seemed to some Phi Beta Kappa delegates still too closely identified with old Normal—its name had been changed to Hunter only in 1914—a training school for teachers, rather than a college with a well established liberal arts program. (Hunter's four-year college program was registered by the Regents in 1908; the first four-year college degrees were awarded in 1909.)

Letters extant for the interval 1916-1919 indicate that Professor Whicher felt encouraged to persevere because of the support of Phi Beta Kappa colleagues on other campuses. Other colleges had applied more than once for a charter, and were to do so later. So now again for three years he worked unwearyingly, month after month, pursuing his goal. Again he wrote many letters and circulated new statements to show that Hunter deserved recognition by Phi Beta Kappa because of its real distinction—the reputation of its faculty, the accomplishments of its graduates, the promise of its student body.

Success came at the triennial meeting in 1919, triumph for the petitioning members of the Hunter faculty, when their application for the College's admission to Phi Beta Kappa was approved. Their names appear on



the charter for our Nu Chapter, among them that of George Samler Davis, president of the College.

The father of Phi Beta Kappa at Hunter, George Meason Whicher was already well known as a teacher of the Classics when he came to old Normal in 1899. A native of Iowa, he had earned his A.B. and A.M. at Grinnell. His reputation as a classicist and archaeologist continued to grow during his twenty-five years of service at Hunter. As chairman of the Classics Department, his influence had a prevailing effect in the development of the liberal arts program in the College. He had gained a reputation, too, as a poet; he had published a number of volumes of lyric verse, and in 1924 he edited an anthology of Hunter College verse.

On leave from Hunter in 1921-22, he was director of the School of Classical Studies of the American Academy in Rome, and the ancient University of Padua conferred an honorary doctorate on him. Some of his students will recall his speaking at a Phi Beta Kappa meeting, after his return, wearing the accoutrements of his new degree, the erect, handsome, white-haired scholar in black gown and black beretta, a white ermine cape on his shoulders.

Alumnae of the College had expressed their regard for Professor Whicher on his retirement in 1924 by presenting the marble bust made by Helen Ross MacLeod '10, a former student. (A photograph in half-tone appears on this *Quarterly* cover.) After his retirement he lived in Amherst. He died there in 1937, at the age of seventy-seven.

3. Nu Chapter at Hunter, 1919-1969

In the autumn of 1919, after their application had been approved, the charter members took careful steps to organize Nu Chapter, to prepare for its formal installation, and to plan for the first election of undergraduate members in course. Professor Whicher continued to act as chairman of the group.

On January 13, 1920 the charter members met to elect their colleague Helen Gray Cone foundation member, the only person so honored by Nu Chapter. Their purpose was to bring her into association with Nu Chapter in a category comparable to a charter member's. Few graduates of the College, few faculty members then enjoyed wider esteem. Professor Cone was chairman of the English Department, an office she held for thirty-seven years. Like Professor Whicher she had been concerned for the expansion of humanistic studies in the College, in the early decades. The author of five volumes of published verse, she had won a measure of popular interest and acclaim.

The formal installation of Nu Chapter took place on the afternoon of February 11, 1920 in the office of President Davis. The national secretary of the United Chapters, Dr. Oscar M. Voorhees, presented Hunter's Phi Beta Kappa charter and spoke to the assembled group:

It is a happy privilege that falls to my lot of being the bearer of this charter which authorizes the organization of the NU CHAPTER OF THE PHI BETA KAPPA IN THE STATE OF NEW YORK. The official designation, the Nu of New York, indicates that

it is to be the thirteenth in the group of sister chapters which grace the educational institutions of the State. . . .

Now in the fullness of time, on the fiftieth anniversary of this institution, I bear to Hunter College this charter as a crown of achievement, and as an incentive to continued high educational endeavor.

The names of the charter members and the text of the charter were then read, and Dr. Voorhees continued:

It gives me especial pleasure to present it to you, Professor Whicher, for I fully recognize that upon you, more than upon any other of your colleagues, has rested the burden of carrying the application through to a successful issue. This fact they have recognized in giving you the honor of being the first president of the chapter. I assure you all of the confident hope and trust of the United Chapters that this chapter, under your fostering care and wise guidance, will in its membership maintain that standard of character and attainment which has characterized the membership of the society in a long past, and which has rendered honorable everywhere the appellation of Phi Beta Kappa.

Following the presentation of the charter, Helen Gray Cone was initiated as foundation member, and the first group of eight members in course was presented for initiation. They were the graduating seniors of the class of January, 1920, with the highest records: Louise M. M. Biehl, Mary Ann Burnett, Edna R. Hamburger, Dorothy Merle Hendrickson, Elsie A. Hoertel, Margaret Provost, Agnes C. L. Sommer, and Rose Heylbut Wollstein.

Nu Chapter faculty were hopeful that the records of the graduates in the decade 1909-1919 might be quickly searched so that those who would have been qualified for election had Hunter then had a chapter might be elected to Nu in the first year, but the task proved too time-consuming. In June of 1920 it was therefore determined to elect only the seven top-ranking graduates of the 1909-1919 classes who had become members of the Hunter faculty: Hannah Mary Egan, Claudine Gray, E. Adelaide Hahn, Olive Eleanor Merritt, Evangeline Ada Moon, Evelyn Walker, and Marguerite Wayman. A year later eighty-eight other alumnae members were elected, top students of the 1909-1919 decade.

Beginning in June, 1920, when seventeen undergraduates were elected from the graduating class, and regularly thereafter, the faculty members of Nu Chapter have determined on the undergraduate candidates for election. In some periods in the past, elections of members in course took place twice yearly—that is, the highest ranking students were elected on the basis of their records at the end of their third year and were called junior members. Other students with high grades were elected as senior members in their last year. Currently, as in recent years, only annual elections are held for senior students.

The pattern for the traditional initiation ceremonies had been set by the Society. Both oratory and poetry marked these occasions at Hunter. Often too there was a musical program. In the initiation rite, conducted by the Chapter officers, Phi Beta Kappa's history and purposes are outlined, and passages from the Society's



The Phi Beta Kappa Fraternity

CHARTER

Gertrude Bishop Austin	Dora Wilhelmina Davis	Elizabeth Mathews
Edward Sandford Burgess	George Samler Davis	Sarah Rush Parks
Elizabeth Brownell Collier	Edgar Dawson	Frida von Anwerth
Philip Raphael Vincent Curoc	Luise Maessler	George Meason Whicher

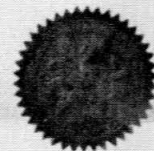
Fellow Members of the Phi Beta Kappa - Greeting:

Whereas, the National Council of the United Chapters of the Phi Beta Kappa Society has by resolution duly adopted on the ninth day of September, 1919, decreed the establishment of a Chapter of the Phi Beta Kappa in connection with Hunter College at New York and has directed the Senate by the President and Secretary to issue a charter in the name of the National Council: Now therefore, by virtue of the aforesaid act of the Council and the authority delegated to us, we do hereby incorporate and establish you and such others as you may hereafter elect and associate with yourselves, in conformity to the law of the Phi Beta Kappa Society, into a separate and subordinate branch of said Society to be known and called the

Nu Chapter of the Phi Beta Kappa in the State of New York

hereby granting unto you and your successors all the powers, privileges and benefits thereunto appertaining, in as full and ample a measure as the members of the other and existing chapters enjoy; at the same time enjoining upon you in the organization and conduct of the new chapter, and as a condition upon which this charter is granted, strict compliance with the Constitution of the United Chapters and the Model Constitution herewith transmitted to you.

In Witness Whereof the said Senate has caused the seal of the United Chapters of the Phi Beta Kappa to be affixed hereto, with the signatures of the President and the Secretary.



Oscar M Voorhees

Secretary

E. A. Buge

President

Manual are read to the elected, before they are asked to stand and respond aloud in accepting Phi Beta Kappa membership—the audience of family and friends gratified witnesses of this ceremony.

Notable scholars, men and women in public life, have been the orators at these initiation meetings at Hunter. There was Stephen Duggan in 1921, Alice Hamilton, professor of Industrial Medicine at Harvard, in 1922. George Whicher returned to speak on "Ideals of Scholarship" in 1928. Max Lerner spoke in 1935 on "Scholarship and Man's Inhumanity"; Marjorie Hope Nicolson, on "The Liberal" in 1940. At the winter initiation in 1943 (when undergraduates were elected twice a year, there were semi-annual initiations), Leonard Bloomfield spoke on "Words and Things"; in the winter of 1950, J. Saunders Redding was the speaker. Vera Micheles Dean delivered the address in June of 1951, Moses Hadas in 1953; and in 1955 Mina Rees spoke on "Scholarship and Security." President Shuster's topic was "Not Accepted Sacrifice" in 1957; Hoxie Fairchild was the speaker in 1959; August Heckscher, in 1962. Last year Donald Fleming described the

biological revolution; Professor Stoessinger gave the address in May of this year. (See page 10.)

Among the poets at Nu initiations there were long ago Anna Hempstead Branch, Amelia Josephine Burr, Lizette Woodworth Reese, and Robert P. Tristram Coffin, reading from their own verse.

In this brief history of five decades some special milestone celebrations should be recalled. When the national Society marked the 150th anniversary of its founding in 1926, there was a gathering of delegates at William and Mary. Nu Chapter was represented by Professor Hahn and Professor Evelyn Walker. The alumnae representative from Nu was the distinguished lawyer Dr. Ruth Lewinson. For those who did not go to Williamsburg there was a large gathering in New York.

In 1940 when Nu celebrated its twentieth anniversary, Mina Rees was president. Two lectures were arranged for public audiences: Louis Adamic delivered an address on "America—A Nation of Nations," and Margaret Mead on "Competition and Cooperation in Savage and Civilized Societies."

The silver jubilee of the Chapter was marked on

February 15, 1945. Thomas Mabbott spoke at the initiation that day on "The Centenary of 'The Raven': The Harmony of Art and Science." The country was still at war, and a special symposium was arranged for the June initiation meeting, on the topic "The American Scholar at War." The participants included Bertha Gold speaking on science, Elizabeth Lynskey on social science, and E. Adelaide Hahn on language.

On December 5, 1951, a formal college assembly was held to celebrate the 175th anniversary, to the day, of the founding of Phi Beta Kappa. Judge Dorothy Kenyon was the speaker, and Professor Vere Rubel, president of Nu, reviewed the history of the Society.

For many years Chapter dinners were arranged, preceding the annual business meetings, to which all members of Nu were invited. Dinners are no longer held; at the annual business meetings officers present reports, and elections of alumni and honorary members take place, when committees have nominees to recommend. Alumni may be recommended for election on the basis of accomplishment after graduation; honorary members, for distinctions won in various endeavors. Among those who were elected honorary members by Nu Chapter were the presidents of the College, James M. Kieran, George N. Shuster, John J. Meng, and Mary L. Gambrell. President Davis was a member of Phi Beta Kappa, as are President Cross and Acting President Weyl.

The heavy responsibilities that Nu Chapter officers have carried through all the decades should be noted, for it is they who have, with cooperating committees, attended to all the business of the Chapter, arranging meetings and programs, gathering material for reports, preparing for the election of members in course. The Chapter by-laws and rules have been regularly reviewed; in this scrutiny Margaret Spahr was ever attentive.

In recent years Beatrice Hyslop and Carolyn Eisele have continued as Chapter presidents the practice of

addressing senior assemblies on the ideals of Phi Beta Kappa. They have also arranged for teas and receptions for students on the Dean's List. Recently there have been special meetings for alumni members of the Chapter; Helaine Newstead, among other officers, has addressed the alumni. In 1964 there was a memorable program both at uptown Hunter and in Manhattan when the late Randall Jarrell, poet and critic, was Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholar.

The custom of inviting to membership in Nu Chapter faculty members who have been elected by their own colleges to Phi Beta Kappa continues, and receptions are frequently held for these newcomers.

Not only Nu's officers, but all of its faculty members have been concerned through the years to maintain standards in the election of undergraduate members in course to Phi Beta Kappa. The Chapter minutes show that there were long discussions, year after year, of the best way to do this. The course of study was regularly reviewed to determine classification of liberal courses, in accordance with the policy recommended by the United Chapters. The students elected to Nu are adjudged to have pursued with success liberal arts courses, that is, to have won high honors in the humanities and in the sciences. Scholarship and character are the twin criteria in elections; the commitment of Phi Beta Kappa is ethical, as well as scholarly. Every elected member promises to uphold the Society's ideals.

"The particular interest of Phi Beta Kappa is in liberal education," and this remains the meaning of the college experience. —ANNA M. TRINSEY

The writer is indebted to Mr. Carl Billman, secretary of the United Chapters in Washington, for advice and help, and to her fellow members of the editorial committee for their great assistance in reading extant records and minutes of Nu Chapter. Material for the history of the founding of Phi Beta Kappa has been drawn from the Society's Manual for Chapter Officers and from the Handbook for New Members.

Nu Chapter has announced that the fiftieth anniversary will be celebrated at the Lotos Club on the evening of Tuesday, February 10, 1970. There will be a detailed notice later. The officers of Nu Chapter are Carolyn Eisele, President; David L. Stevenson, Vice President; Homer S. Price, Secretary-Treasurer; Dorothy R. Blitsten, Assistant Secretary-Treasurer; Russell A. White, Recording Secretary; Jane Benardete and Ralph L. Ward, Members-at-Large.

Nu Chapter's fiftieth anniversary coincides with Hunter's Centennial, and the Chapter's celebration of its birthday is one of the events scheduled for Centennial Week in mid-February. Dean Ruth G. Weintraub, alumna member of Nu, is chairman of the College Committee on the Centennial.
