

**THE CENTENARY OF ALPHA OF
NEW YORK OF PHI BETA
KAPPA: CELEBRATED AT UNION
COLLEGE, JUNE 11 AND 12, 1917**

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*With speech by
William H. Taft.*

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

THE CENTENARY
of
ALPHA OF NEW YORK
of
PHI BETA KAPPA

**Celebrated at Union College
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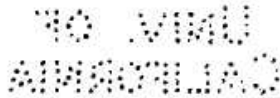
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Celebrated at Union College, June 11 and 12, 1917

Alpha of New York of Phi Beta Kappa commemorated the one hundredth anniversary of the institution of the Alpha during the past commencement of Union College. Public exercises were held on Monday afternoon, June 11, at four o'clock in the chapel of Union College and members of the Alpha, with their guests, dined at the Mohawk Club, Schenectady, on Tuesday evening, June 12. Dr. Alexander Duane, '78, president of Alpha of New York, presided at both meetings. The following delegates represented some of the chapters in the State of New York: Gordon R. Fonda, Beta of New York at New York University; Charles Sears Baldwin, Delta of New York at Columbia University; F. L. S. Shepardson, Eta of New York at Colgate University; H. C. Hasbrouck, Theta of New York at Cornell University; John R. Slater, Iota of New York at Rochester University; Miss Ellen Van Slyke, Mu of New York at Vassar College. Professor Edwin A. Grosvenor of Amherst College, president of the United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa, was the guest of honor. The Rev. Dr. Oscar M. Voorhees, secretary, represented the United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa. The



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eldest member of Alpha of New York present was the Rev. Dr. Alfred P. Botsford of Woodbury, N. J., who was graduated from Union College seventy years ago with the class of 1847. By his courtliness and his geniality he contributed much to the pleasure of the occasion. The members of the committee on arrangements were John Ira Bennett, '90, Professor Morton Collins Stewart and Professor Frank Coe Barnes. They were greatly assisted by Dr. Alexander Duane, president of Alpha of New York, and by Mr. Louis Oppenheim, '75, who collected most of the fund sought to defray expenses. Alpha is grateful to many members, who contributed generously, and specially grateful to Mr. Courtland V. Anable, '81, who was the principal contributor.

Following is a report of the

PUBLIC EXERCISES

DR. ALEXANDER DUANE: Members of the Phi Beta Kappa, ladies and gentlemen assembled:

I greet you all here at this centennial. It is a notable anniversary. We are met to celebrate the centennial of the foundation of Phi Beta Kappa at Union College. We celebrate it amid the clash of arms, and when the energies and the thoughts of all are directed in preparation for the greatest struggle that this country has ever engaged in, a struggle against foes without, and against traitors and misled fanatics within.

It may seem strange that amid these compelling circumstances that engage our energies and our attention we should turn aside to celebrate an occasion like this. But it is not strange; there is no anomaly in it. Phi Beta Kappa itself was born in the midst of war. It was born when the nation was struggling for the very right to live. Its founders were no cloistered students; they were no mere dreamers, but men of action. They were scholars to be sure. They were selected for their intellect. But their scholarship and their

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intellect were directed to the benefit of their country and for the advancement of freedom. Then, as now, the spirit of democracy was in the air, urging men all over the world to combat the forces that sought to enslave the world. That spirit pervaded the men that founded Phi Beta Kappa, and it is evident from their utterances and from their actions that that was the spirit which the society they founded was designed to promulgate.

Witness the charter that was issued to Harvard two years after the society was founded, which begins in this wise: "Whereas, it is repugnant to the liberal principles of societies that they be confined to any place, men, or description of men, and the same should be extended to the wise and virtuous of every degree, and of every country." Brave words those for a period like that in which caste and prejudice reigned.

Nine men assembled to form at the College of William and Mary December 5, 1776, the *Societas Philosophica*, indicated by the letters *Phi Beta Kappa*, corresponding to the Greek "*φιλοσοφία βίου κυβερνήτης*," which our distinguished president, Professor Grosvenor, has aptly interpreted "the love of wisdom is the guide of life." It is not, you observe, the love of knowledge, nor the pursuit of it that is the basic principle of this society. It is the love of wisdom, of knowledge applied to right uses and to the service of man. Surely a motto and a guide worthy of all admiration—a motto as inspiring and a guide as sure to us in these grim days as they were to those brave lads in the even darker days of 1776.

It would be worth while, I think, to consider for a moment the character of the men and the character of the society that they established at William and Mary. The men themselves were of the highest character, and of much more than the usual ability. Of the fifty men that constituted the society of William and Mary before its extinction in 1781

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there were many that were distinguished afterwards as soldiers, jurists, statesmen, and in other capacities. It would be hard to find in any similar group a collective record that was more brilliant.

Again, the society that they founded was in all essential respects the prototype of the Greek letter fraternity of today. It was secret; it was profoundly secret. Moreover, at William and Mary it was extended to all classes in that college, and the members held frequent meetings during the college year. Finally, they insisted not merely upon scholarship, nor even character, but also on friendship as constituting the basic principles of the society.

In 1779 the Chapter determined to form subsidiary organizations, although their manner of forming them seems peculiar. They did not at first undertake to form chapters, or branches, as they called them, in other colleges, but in other towns in Virginia, and designated these chapters as Beta, Gamma, Delta, and so on. Whether this was actually done or not does not appear, but it furnished a precedent that was extremely important, inasmuch as it was the actual salvation of the society. For at that time at William and Mary there was a young man named Elisha Parmelee, who had been at both Harvard and Yale, but who had come South for his health and had taken up his studies at William and Mary. Observing this move to form new chapters, he suggested that branches be formed not simply in Virginia, but also in the neighboring states. Acting on his suggestion the society determined, and he was commissioned, to form chapters at Yale and Harvard called respectively the Alpha of Connecticut and the Alpha of Massachusetts Bay. These were established respectively in 1780 and 1781. In all essential regards they were like the parent chapter, except that almost from the beginning the membership in them was confined to the senior class, with a few from the junior class.

This step, namely, the establishment of these branches at

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Harvard and Yale, was extremely fortunate because immediately afterward the parent chapter at William and Mary was extinguished by Arnold's invasion of Virginia; the College of William and Mary was burned down and the chapter, perforce, closed. The few students who were left in college confided their archives under seal to the college authorities with the confident expectation that, as they said, the chapter would "arise again to life everlasting and glory immortal." And it is interesting to note that seventy years later the chapter was re-established and re-established by the sanction of one of the original members who was still living.

A few years later a chapter was established at Dartmouth, forming the Alpha of New Hampshire, and in 1817 the fifth chapter in the order of establishment was formed at this college. Of the course of this chapter I will not speak. Professor Bennett will tell you something of that later. But it may be said that there are some misconceptions regarding the formation which have led to erroneous beliefs regarding the policy pursued here. Because the charter was confided in the beginning to graduates, not to undergraduates, and because Union proceeded to take in a large number of honorary members, it was supposed that Union was the pioneer in the changes that were beginning to take place in Phi Beta Kappa itself, a transformation, that is, from an undergraduate secret society into a graduate, practically non-secret fraternity. That view seems to be erroneous. At Union, at all events, the proceedings were secret and remained so almost up to the present time, and for many years the chapter proceeded on the lines of an undergraduate organization, frequent meetings being held during the college year.

There was one thing that the establishment of a chapter at Union did do, a very important thing in American college

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life. I think there is no question at all but that the establishment of Phi Beta Kappa here in 1817 gave the impetus that resulted in the formation in 1825 and 1827 of the triad of Greek letter fraternities, Kappa Alpha, Sigma Phi and Delta Phi at Union.

These fraternities were in some respects—in externals, at all events—modeled after Phi Beta Kappa. But that they did not regard Phi Beta Kappa as in any sense a rival was shown by the fact that members of all of them became members of Phi Beta Kappa, although the three societies themselves were at bitter odds. It does seem likely that the reminiscences of the earlier days of Phi Beta Kappa, of the society as it existed at William and Mary, an undergraduate secret society that laid peculiar emphasis on friendship, gave the impetus to the formation of these societies at Union, similarly constituted.

Up to 1845 all the chapters so far constituted had been Alphas; that is, each had been the original and sole chapter in that state in which it was formed. Thus the Alpha of Rhode Island was formed at Brown, and the Alpha of Maine at Bowdoin, and so forth.

In 1845 Yale exercised a privilege that William and Mary exercised in the beginning, that of forming subordinate chapters in the same state, establishing one at Trinity and another at Wesleyan. This example was followed by other Alphas, and Union, in particular, established in succession chapters at New York University, the College of the City of New York, Columbia, Hamilton, Hobart, Colgate and Cornell.

In 1881 at the centennial of the formation of the Harvard chapter Harvard invited the different chapters to meet in convention, and at this convention a new policy was inaugurated. Forthwith Phi Beta Kappa from a loose confederation of distinct groups of state societies, each group under its state head or Alpha, became a national fraternity