

THE GREEK RITE

A Survey of Undergraduate Fraternities Founded by Masons

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IT WOULD PROBABLY SURPRISE many to know that quite a few Greek-letter fraternities had their founding by Freemasons! This is worth exploring if only because of the vast mystery and societal misconceptions that surround these fraternal organizations.

The idea of a college fraternity had been established in 1750 with the formation of the Flat Hat Club (FHC), a secret society which was literary and social in nature, but not Greek. The FHC was the forerunner to fraternity life at the College of William and Mary, the second oldest college in the United States. FHC was founded on November 11, 1750, at the Raleigh Tavern in Williamsburg, Virginia.¹ The society was active from 1750 through the early 1770s, when membership dwindled. The first collegiate fraternity, Phi Beta Kappa, had all the characteristics of today's fraternities: a motto, a ritual, a badge, principals of high idealism, a bond of friendship, and camaraderie, and an urge to share the organization's values through expansion to other campuses. These are also specific Masonic ideals and goals.

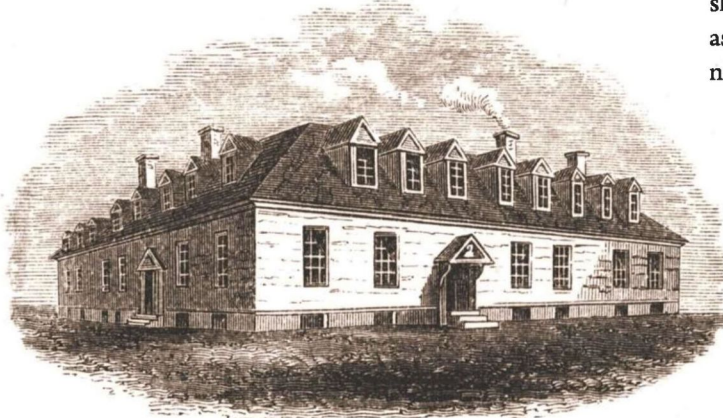
Freemasonry traces its formal founding back to the establishment of the Grand Lodge of England in 1717. By 1776, the

same year as the independence of the United States, the founding of a different fraternal organization with Masonic beginnings would ignite a fire that would spread throughout hundreds of college campuses across the United States as well as campuses beyond our borders. We know them today as "Greek-letter fraternities." What follows is a brief survey of the impact of Freemasonry on the founding of Greek-letter fraternities on college campuses.

PHI BETA KAPPA (ΦΒΚ)

On December 5, 1776, a group of undergraduate students attending the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, met informally in the Raleigh Tavern. They had decided to establish an organization that was unlike any other fraternal group on campus—their organization would be dedicated to the promotion of "friendship as its basis and benevolence and literature as its pillars."² This group eventually would be named the Phi Beta Kappa Society, a fraternity that many credit with the tradition of naming American college societies after initials of "secret" Greek mottos, hence "Greek-letter fraternities." What many do not know, however, is that Phi Beta Kappa's origin had a strong Masonic influence.

While the principal founder John Heath himself was not a Mason (as he was only 15 at the time), another co-founder, Thomas Smith was a Mason. Smith belonged to Williamsburg Masonic Lodge before he joined Heath as a founding member of Phi Beta Kappa. Within the next year, nine of the founding members would be raised as Master Masons, and over a dozen of the subsequent 50 members would be associated with both organizations in the years



Wood engraving of Raleigh Tavern (1880)

Engraving: The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs: Print Collection, The New York Public Library. "Raleigh Tavern ; The Apollo Room." New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed July 27, 2016. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47da-fbd0-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>



Greek plate illustration:
Elizabeth A. W.
McCarthy



to come. Today, Phi Beta Kappa has 284 active chapters across the United States. Since its founding, over 150 similar organizations would emerge on college campuses across the country, with several of them being established by Brother Masons.

ACACIA

The Acacia fraternity (indicia, right) was founded at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor on May 12, 1904, by a group of 14 Freemasons. In the beginning, membership of the fraternity required the student to be a Master Mason in good standing. However, due to the decline of undergraduate Masons at the end of the 1920s, the fraternity began to drop the Master Mason requirement in 1931 and completely removed it by 1933.

The fraternity continues to use several Masonic symbols throughout its operation today, namely the acacia sprig which reminds Masons of that part of man that survives the grave. To-



day it has almost 40 strong and active undergraduate chapters throughout North America.

SIGMA MU SIGMA (ΣΜΣ) & TAU KAPPA EPSILON (ΤΚΕ)

Much like the Acacia fraternity, Sigma Mu Sigma (indicia, right) was also founded as an undergraduate Masonic organization. In March of 1935, three Knights Templar Freemasons in Angola, Indiana, founded the Sigma Mu Sigma fraternity on Tri-State University's campus. Originally, like Acacia, the organization was only open to undergraduate Master Masons in good standing. However, the Great Depression also forced the organization to drop the Master Mason requirement and eventually caused most of the Sigma Mu Sigma chapters to be absorbed



into the larger fraternity of Tau Kappa Epsilon in the early 1930s. Coincidentally, Tau Kappa Epsilon (indicia, left) also was founded by a Freemason, C. Roy Atkinson. Today, Tau Kappa Epsilon has 268,000 members on 251 active college campuses.

In 1940, Brother Clyde E. Shaw attempted to revive Sigma Mu Sigma. This iteration lasted until 1952 when the organization merged with Sigma Alpha Chi or the "Square and Compass" Fraternity. Only one ΣΜΣ chapter remains active today as a co-ed service organization on the campus of the College of William and Mary.

SIGMA ALPHA CHI (ΣΑΧ) & KAPPA SIGMA (ΚΣ)

Originally called the Square and Compass Fraternity, the organization was incorporated at Lexington, Virginia, in 1817 by the members of the Washington and Lee University Masonic Club. Since many of its original members were also members of other Greek-letter organizations, the group could not affiliate with other Masonic fraternities such as Acacia. During that year, however, World War I broke out, and all its founding members either joined the Army or the Navy. Those who returned to Washington and Lee's campus would reactivate the fraternity in 1919, and the fraternity underwent a vigorous expansion program in 1920. Throughout the next decade, the organization would charter 57 chapters and initiate over 5,000 members. Unfortunately, the Great Depression and World War II caused the fraternity to lose chapters and eventually reduce them to only existing on paper. Master Mason Dr. William Moseley Brown, however, kept the charter and official documents.

Eventually, the organization reemerged without the Master Mason requirement in the late 1940s. In 1952, Sigma Alpha Chi (no indicia available) and Sigma Mu Sigma would

merge into the organization known today as Sigma Mu Sigma-Square and Compass. The exception was the Lambda chapter at Elon University in Elon, North Carolina, which would be incorporated and become the Lambda-Lambda chapter of the Kappa Sigma Fraternity (indicia, right) in 1973. Interestingly enough, the Kappa Sigma fraternity's ritual was written by one of their founders in the 1870s, Stephen Alonzo Jackson, who was also a Freemason from Virginia.



SIGMA NU (ΣΝ)

The Sigma Nu fraternity was established after James Frank Hopkins was raised a Master Mason in 1868 at the Mountain City Lodge No. 67 in Lexington, VA, during his third year at the Virginia Military Institute (VMI). After witnessing the hazing incidents of other fraternities on VMI's campus the following year, his Masonic teaching inspired him to create a similar organization that would be a better representation of fraternity life than what was present on his campus. On January 1, 1869, Hopkins along with fellow undergrads and Confederate American Civil War veterans Greenfield Quarles and James Riley established The Legion of Honor, which would become Sigma Nu. Today, Sigma Nu continues to impart the teaching of Freemasonry into its undergraduates across 184 active chapters on college campuses throughout the United States. Total membership is 230,000.



KAPPA ALPHA (KA)

Known as the Kappa Alpha Order, the fraternity was established at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia, on December 21, 1865. James Woods and three other students originally established the fraternity as Phi Kappa Chi. However, the local chapter of Phi Kappa Psi protested the new fraternity's name was too similar to theirs. During their lives, all four original founders were Master Masons, with Wood belonging to the Moorefield Lodge in Moorefield, West Virginia. In 1866,, the ritual was rewritten by Samuel Z. Ammen, who had been raised at Friendship Lodge No. 66 in Fincastle, Virginia, making him the practical founder of the Kappa Alpha Order. Ammen later stated, "I drew heavily upon my experience as a Master Mason in crafting the new ritual."³



Their ceremony utilizes various symbolism of the York Rite's Knights Templar organization as well as symbolism from Craft

Masonry. Today, the Kappa Alpha Order has 133 active chapters with approximately 150,000 members throughout the country.

LAMBDA CHI ALPHA (ΛΧΑ)

Founded on the campus of Boston University by Warren A. Cole and a group of fellow undergraduates in November of 1909, the fourth largest fraternity in North America with 280,000 members spread across 218 university campuses internationally. Founder Cole was a 50-year member of Pioneer Lodge in Somerset, Massachusetts.



More significantly, the fraternity's ritual was written by a Freemason named Jack Mason of Philadelphia Lodge No. 51 in Pennsylvania. His goal was to improve the organization's ritual practices, while instilling various Masonic lessons throughout their ceremony, including familiar symbols like the compass, light, and a similar degree structure to that of traditional Masonic Blue Lodges.

ALPHA PHI ALPHA (ΑΦΑ)

Alpha Phi Alpha was the first intercollegiate Greek-letter fraternity that was established solely for African-American men on the campus of Cornell University. In December 1905, principal founder Charles Poindexter met with 15 students, which included Vertner Tandy, a Prince Hall Mason from Lexington, Kentucky, and George B. Kelley who was also active in Masonic circles and also an employee of Beta Theta Pi, in order to form an organization that developed leaders and promoted brotherhood, along with advocacy for social issues throughout their communities. In fact, the organization held its first initiation in a Masonic lodge in Ithaca, New York. The legend has it that while in the Masonic lodge, they opened up the lockers and used the various Masonic regalia that was found inside in order to enhance their own ritual. The fraternity also uses many Egyptian themes, such as the Great Sphinx of Giza, in their regalia and symbols. Today, the fraternity has over 400 chartered collegiate chapters with more than 250,000 members. One prominent member of Alpha Phi Alpha was Charles H. Wesley, Prince Hall Freemason and Sovereign Grand Inspector General of the Scottish Rite Southern Jurisdiction, PHA. Wesley, a prolific writer and scholar, was their 14th president. Wesley was the President of Wilberforce College from 1942 to 1946.



PHI BETA SIGMA (ΦΒΣ)

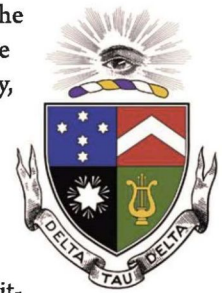
Phi Beta Kappa is another Black Greek-letter Organization. It was founded on the campus of Howard University in Washington, DC, on January 9, 1914, by three young African-American

male students. Although it is unclear as to whether the organization was directly started by a Freemason. (Founder A. Langston Taylor was an active Mason, but it is not known whether or not he was a Mason during his undergraduate career.) The organization states that its “Practices are based upon Masonic influence.”⁴



DELTA TAU DELTA (ΔΤΔ)

The fraternity was founded through the usurpation of a literary society on the campus of Bethany College in Bethany, West Virginia, known as the Neotrophan Society. According to founder Jacob S. Lowe, a group of students met in Lowe’s room in 1858 as a means to return control of the organization to the students. On March 5, 1858, the literary society was reorganized and a constitution, name, badge, ritual, and motto were settled upon, and the Delta Tau Delta fraternity was established. Among these eight men was Brother William R. Cunningham who was influential in the development of the ritual and constitution, which contain Masonic language and symbolism. Today, the fraternity has almost 140 chapters on campuses across the United States.



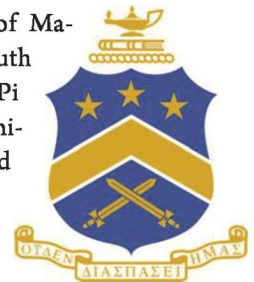
ALPHA PHI OMEGA (ΑΦΩ)

This national co-ed service organization, also known as APO, was founded on the principles of fellowship derived from Freemasonry and from Scout Law of the Boy Scouts of America. Founder Frank Reed Horton and 14 other undergrads founded the fraternity in 1925 at Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania. Horton was raised a Master Mason on June 18, 1918, at Western Star Lodge No. 37 in Norfolk, Connecticut. His Masonic light along with a desire to continue participating in the ideals of Scouting led him to establish Alpha Phi Omega. Since its founding, the organization has become one of the largest fraternities in the United States with 350 chapters and 400,000 members.



PI KAPPA PHI (ΠΚΦ)

Founder Lawrence Harry Mixson of Masonic Lodge No. 73 in Charleston, South Carolina, aided in the founding of Pi Kappa Phi and also wrote the organization’s ritual, which was influenced by his Masonic background. Mixson, along with two fellow undergrads founded Pi Kappa Phi on December 10, 1904, at the College of Charleston in Charleston, South Carolina. Originally, the fraternity was known as Nu Phi, which stood for “non-fraternity.” Today the organization has more than 170 chapters with more than 113,000 lifetime members.



OMEGA PSI PHI (ΩΨΦ)

The principal founder of this fraternity was Edgar Amos Love, a Prince Hall Freemason who was also a founding member of Corinthian Lodge No. 68 in Washington, DC. The organization was established on November 17, 1911, at Howard University in Washington, DC. Omega Psi Phi is another predominately African-American fraternity and the first to be founded on the campus of a historically black university. Today it has over 250 active chapters across the United States. Some notable members of Omega Psi Phi include Bill Cosby, Langston Hughes, Rev. Jesse Jackson, Shauquille O’Neal, and Michael Jordan.



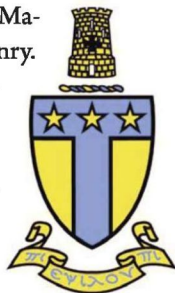
PHI OMEGA PI (ΦΩΠ) & DELTA ZETA (ΔΖ)

Men’s fraternities were not the only undergraduate organizations founded by those who had received Masonic inspiration. The 15 founding women of Phi Omega Pi (no indicia available) were all members of the Order of the Eastern Star. Founded in 1922 on the campus of the University of Nebraska, the organization was originally known as Aethoth, which means “sister” in Hebrew and was exclusive to undergraduate Eastern Star members. In 1933, the organization dropped the Masonic requirement and was granted membership into the National Panhellenic Council of North America. Later that same year, the organization absorbed two other sororities, Sigma Phi Beta and Sigma Sigma Omicron. In 1946, the



ALPHA TAU OMEGA (ΑΤΩ)

While the organization was not founded by a Mason, it was heavily influenced by Freemasonry. Founder Otis Allan Glazebrook was often intrigued by “medieval mysteries and Masonic lore.”⁵ Like Sigma Nu, the fraternity also was founded on the campus of the Virginia Military Institute in 1865. Today, the organization has 250 chartered chapters with over 250,000 members across the United States.



“THE GREEK RITE” is continued on p. 28.

THE GREEK RITE *(Continued from p. 11)*

organization was absorbed into the Delta Zeta Sorority (indicia on p. 11), which has over 160 collegiate chapters and nearly 250,000 members, making it the third largest sorority in the United States.

By no means is this list an exhaustive source of undergraduate fraternities started or influenced by Freemasons, as there are 123 different Greek letter fraternities and sororities nationwide totaling more than nine million members! For the sake of brevity, only 16 fraternities are listed in this survey. †

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1. "The Flat Hat Club". Vol 25. No. 3 *William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine*. January 1917. pp. 161–4. 1 July 2016.
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