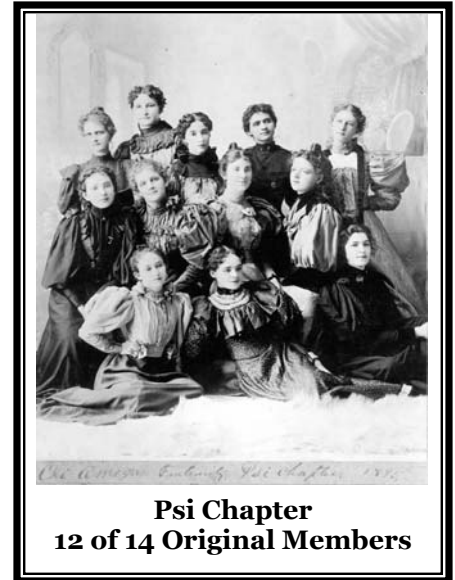


THE FRATERNITY'S EARLY YEARS

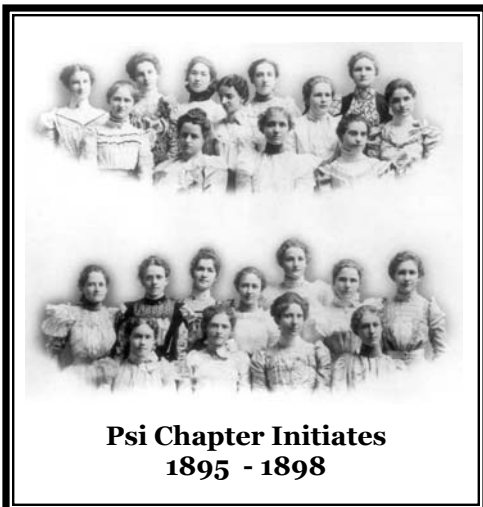
Chi Omega's first year was spent perfecting the organization and gaining local strength. Of the original four Founders and ten charter members, eleven returned to the University in September 1895. During the school year that followed, eight new members were initiated, four in the autumn and four in the spring. (In this period, it was customary for fraternities to have a comparatively small membership). It was during this first year that Chi Omega began to acquire a reputation for graciousness and poise and for doing things well.

During this period, the subject of adding Chi Omega chapters on other campuses was frequently discussed at chapter meetings. Members wrote to friends attending universities in Texas, Missouri, Kentucky and Tennessee, but no special interest was aroused. Dr. Richardson corresponded with Kappa Sigma friends, who made cordial responses, but it quickly became evident that it would take time to make the proper contacts. The impatience of youth brought discouragement to the small band of sisters as they sought to expand their Fraternity to other campuses.



**Psi Chapter
12 of 14 Original Members**

Meanwhile, weekly chapter meetings included the reading aloud of articles from fraternity magazines, studying of parliamentary law, careful reading of the Chi Omega Constitution and the presentation of literary programs. Some of the meeting time was used for discussing financial matters: members set dues at 10 cents per month and the Initiation fee was \$2.50. Planning social events and thoughtful selection of refreshments also required careful consideration, just as they do today. The minutes of a February 1896 chapter meeting indicate that the Chi Omegas "would receive" the following Saturday from 3 to 6 and serve chicken salad, cake, wafers and olives. To equitably divide the cost of this event, members were assessed 40 cents, except those who were to furnish chicken; they were assessed 15 cents. During the first two years, the Ritual and Constitution were reviewed and revised to reflect actual practices and the lines along which the Fraternity was developing. In 1897, Ida Pace (Purdue) and Jobelle Holcombe were responsible for the first of several amendments to these cornerstone documents.



**Psi Chapter Initiates
1895 - 1898**

Finally, three and one-half years after its founding, Chi Omega added its second chapter. Chi Chapter at Jessamine Institute in Nicholasville, Kentucky, was installed in December of 1898. Shortly thereafter, a third

chapter was founded at Hellmuth Woman's College (Phi Chapter) in London, Ontario, Canada. The installations of both chapters were due to the networking efforts of Psi Chapter alumnae. In the fall of 1898, as expansion appeared imminent, alumnae and undergraduate members of Psi Chapter met in a home near the University and elected national officers with full authority to grant charters and establish chapters as provided by the Constitution. Dr. Richardson felt this was properly Chi Omega's first convention and presented the unparalleled condition of a fraternity with complete organization and working machinery and only one chapter. Founder Jean Vincenheller was the first national president.

THE FRATERNITY'S EARLY YEARS

CHI OMEGA BECOMES TRULY NATIONAL...

Other women's fraternities founded earlier in the mid-west and east had established chapters on southern campuses without long-lasting success. From the outset, Chi Omega was designed to be a national organization and Dr. Richardson was one of the most energetic in suggesting ways to carry out this plan. It was through his influence and because of his planning that some of the early applications for charters from distant states were received, and he assisted in the investigations of petitions for charters. When it began to grow, Chi Omega expanded naturally and easily into every part of the country, and whenever a new chapter was installed, members in all other chapters wore the colors beneath their pins or sent telegrams or letters of welcome and congratulations.

After the additions of Chi and Phi chapters in 1898 and 1899, six more chapters were chartered and the first alumnae chapter came into existence in Fayetteville, Arkansas during the college year 1899-1900. After this initial expansion, the Fraternity began to grow explosively. With an increasingly popular national reputation and through the influence of alumnae and Dr. Richardson, 17 chapters were installed by 1905 when the Fraternity celebrated its tenth anniversary. Chapters stretched from coast to coast, in the mid-west, far west and south. Unsolicited petitions came from every part of the United States.

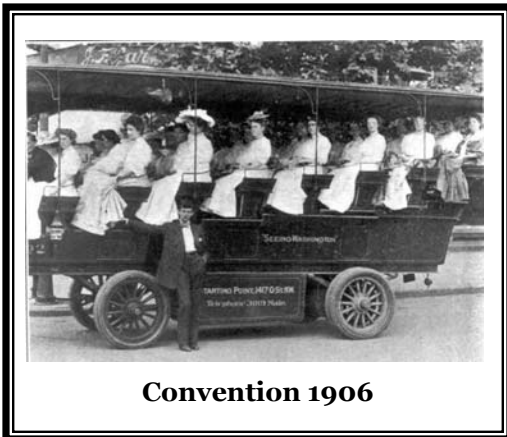
The first Chi Omega charters were very simple, printed on paper of average quality and entirely in red ink. Only one of these is known to exist today: the charter of Sigma Chapter, founded December 5, 1899, at Randolph-Macon Woman's College. Charter members' names were written on the document by hand and national officers signed at the bottom. A gold seal in the lower left corner added a bit of color. This treasured item is now on display in our National Archives at the Executive Headquarters in Memphis, Tennessee.



After the St. Louis Convention of 1904, Chi Omega began expanding into the northeast. Even though Sigma at Randolph- Macon Woman's College was in Virginia and Phi Alpha at Washington University was in Washington, D.C., these were considered southern locations. There were chapters in Texas, Nebraska and California but to be truly national, Chi Omega had to enter the northeast. Through the efforts of Mattie Craighill (Nicholas), the editor of *The Eleusis* at the time, Chi Omega established ties to the northeast by 1906.

The first northeastern chapter was in Pennsylvania. Through a network of personal friendships, *The Eleusis* fell into the hands of a local sorority, Omega Psi, at Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. One of their alumnae members, Mary Love Collins, was so taken with the publication that she influenced the collegians and alumnae to apply for a Chi Omega charter. Mary Love Collins remarked, "Here is a young Fraternity, founded in the South. It has a spirit that is different from that of these older societies of northern origin. Let us try to join with this, grow up with it, and help to make it great."

THE FRATERNITY'S EARLY YEARS



Convention 1906

At the Washington Convention in the summer of 1906, a petition for a charter from Omega Psi was received. According to Mattie Craighill (Nicholas), It was like nothing the Council members had ever seen - a long, narrow booklet, the shape of an accountant's booklet, bound in white leather, embossed with a golden seal (or coat of arms) of Omega Psi or Dickinson College maybe. The edges of the paper were gilt, the paper thick and fine, the printing and photographs of excellent quality. There was everything in it that we could want to know about the College and the local applying. Even though every Council member appreciated the beautiful presentation, the petition was denied - Dickinson did not

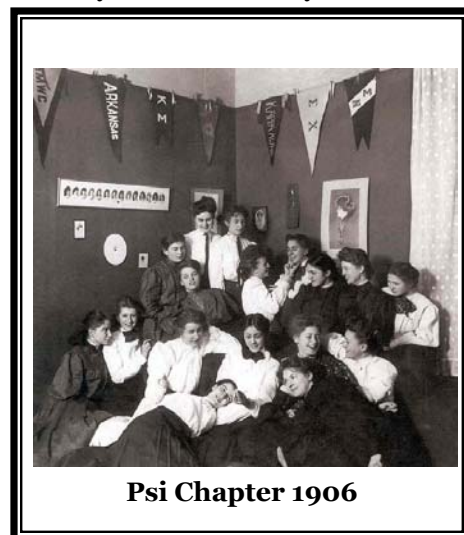
have 100 women at the time and was considered "too small." This disappointing ruling, however, did not stop the very determined Mary Love Collins in the pursuit of her goal.

In September of 1906, Mattie moved to New York City to pursue a master's degree in education. In October, she found Mary Love Collins on her doorstep - seeking a charter for Omega Psi. After this meeting, Mattie sent an urgent letter to Ida Pace. Ida Pace answered by telegraph, asking Mattie to go to Carlisle to investigate Dickinson College. Impressed by the college and the members of Omega Psi, Mattie sent a glowing report and soon the charter was granted. Mattie was the installing officer at the installation ceremony. At the conclusion of the ceremony, Mattie said her eyes met Mary Love's and Mattie knew that destiny had spoken: Delta Chapter was founded and Mary Love was a Chi Omega. Mattie always felt this was the best thing she ever did for her Fraternity.

In quick succession, petitions were received from the Chi Club, a local group at Barnard College in New York City, and from a local group named Beta Phi at Colby College in Waterville, Maine. Both petitions were granted. Epsilon Chapter at Barnard College and Beta at Colby College were chartered. Mattie noted during a visit to the Colby campus that she had a vision of Chi Omega's "truly national character." At this point, the Fraternity was truly national. There was no question that Chi Omega was the first, truly national women's fraternity.

WHAT WERE CHI OMEGAS LIKE IN THE EARLY YEARS??

Minutes of chapter meetings reflect the light-hearted spirit of our early members. They attended lectures, concerts, receptions, cadet hops and class dances. They went to meetings of literary societies, sang in glee clubs and played in orchestras. They joined athletic associations and enjoyed "fraternity frolics." At the same time, they developed close and lasting friendships. Rush, now called Recruitment, was the heart and soul of the chapter's year. Extensive planning and work went into their "stunts" (a "party" by today's definition) to "show the girls together and promote harmony and sympathy in the chapter." The 1909 Manual of Chi Omega advises that "when all is planned before school begins, a great deal of time is saved for individual rushing which really counts." Chapters rejoiced to announce their new member classes of two and three women at the end of rush. (Remember that chapter sizes were much smaller then!)



Psi Chapter 1906