

Ida Pace Purdue

Ida Pace Purdue became a member while Chi Omega was still a local sorority. In the fourteen years that followed her initiation, she untiringly directed her enormous talents and energy toward the development of the Fraternity and its expansion into a national women's Fraternity without equal. During our early years, hers was the mind and heart that shaped the policies and hers the guiding hand that effectively executed the wisely laid plans of the Fraternity. Without her efforts and influence, it is quite possible there would be no Chi Omega as we know it today.



Ida Pace began teaching English at the University of Arkansas in the fall of 1895, the semester following Chi Omega's founding. Dr. Richardson would occasionally call on her, and his favorite topic of conversation was always fraternity life. She was interested, at first objectively, because she saw the opportunities for closer friendships among women students, for the broadening of their outlooks, and for inspiration towards real accomplishment in life. Ida's interest later took a subjective turn: early Chi Omegas were her students, and a group of them would often congregate in her classroom to talk over a subject that interested them.

At the same time, Dr. Richardson realized the young women who founded Chi Omega and constituted the early chapter were a fine group but inexperienced and unable to lay the foundation for the great national women's fraternity that he dreamed it would become. Recognizing the need for more mature leadership, he suggested they ask Miss Pace to become a Chi Omega. They were reluctant, however, saying she would not want to join a group of undergraduates. "You ask her," he said.

One day, three young Chi Omegas went to Ida Pace's classroom—but not to discuss an interesting scholastic topic. They invited her to become a member of their sorority. Although she had not previously thought about the possibility of affiliating, she gave them the affirmative answer for which Dr. Richardson's frequent conversations had paved the way. Ida's "rush" had consisted of her having the best information possible from an authority and in seeing the prudent young Chi Omegas in her classroom excel in their studies and in their personal lives. Psi Chapter initiated her shortly after the small band of Chi Omega Sisters celebrated their first anniversary.



From the time of her initiation in the spring of 1896 until she resigned her position as national president in 1910, Ida Pace Purdue was the guiding hand of Chi Omega's destiny. As founder and then editor of *The Eleusis* from 1898-1904, she was, in reality but without benefit of title, the head of the Fraternity. During these years, two duly elected presidents and one acting president, because of illness, home responsibilities and a long trip abroad, were unable to serve their terms of office and the Purdue home became the "White House" of Chi Omega. She was the very backbone and heart of Chi Omega, making the decisions and directing the general policies; she was especially interested in

founding new chapters and engaged in extensive correspondence to promote the Fraternity's growth. Dr. Richardson later said, "If it had not been for the wisdom, energy, loyalty, and fine literary ability of Ida Pace Purdue, it is likely that Chi Omega would not have survived."

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At the 1904 St. Louis Convention, Jobelle Holcombe presided but it was Ida, who sat close beside her, who was “the power behind the throne.” It was at that Convention that she was elected to the position in which she had unofficially served for three years. As national president during the crucial six years between 1904 and 1910, Ida laid the foundation of traditions, policies and procedures which started Chi Omega on the well-planned route that led from success to even greater success.

Ida was an expansionist but more important than anything else, she worked for the unification of Chi Omega especially so that no officer or chapter should have any reason to feel that there was a North or South in the Fraternity. When she retired in 1910, the foundation had been laid and the tools for future growth were in place. *The Manual of Chi Omega*, which appeared in 1909, was dedicated to “Ida Pace Purdue, whose untiring service, wise judgment and ennobling influence...have contributed more than any other cause to Chi Omega’s growth.”

