

Mattie Craighill Nicholas

Sister Matt, as she was affectionately known in later years, was among those initiated in 1899 as charter members of Sigma Chapter at Randolph-Macon Woman's College in Lynchburg, Virginia. At that time she was a 17-year-old, second year student, and her given name was Mattie Holiday Craighill. Because her father's business reversal and ill health had brought her once prestigious family to financial ruin, she attended Randolph-Macon on a scholarship, having received the highest scholastic average in her high school class. The college had opened only five years before she enrolled, and Mattie's class of 1903 had thirty-odd graduates, the largest number since the school opened in 1893.



After her initiation, Mattie was immediately selected chapter correspondent. Through her letters to her Sisters (in the summers she personally wrote to each one), Council members and *The Eleusis* Editor Ida Pace Purdue, her enthusiasm for Chi Omega was evident. Ida personally wrote to Mattie to thank her for her outstanding work, making Mattie feel proud and capable.

Decades after her years as an active member of Sigma Chapter, Mattie remembered that, "Wearing the pin (of Chi Omega) was a constant joy to me. It was hard to buy that pin, the little old-fashioned flat pin, costing then \$5.00; it was hard, too, to afford the \$5.00 initiation fee. Chapter dues were 5 cents a month. None of the original six Sigma's had much money in those simple days...often we walked down the long dirt road to town to save streetcar fare and as someone once remarked, 'we'd wear out a \$2.50 pair of shoes to save a three cent car ticket. 'But we said we did it for exercise!'"

As a new college graduate in 1903, Mattie did not have the money to attend Chi Omega's third biennial Convention, scheduled that summer in St. Louis to coincide with the opening of the World's Fair. Luckily for Mattie and for Chi Omega, the Fair was not ready in 1903 and was rescheduled for 1904, as was the Convention. By that time Mattie had saved enough to attend. She was proud to be present as delegates recognized Sigma as the chapter that had best fulfilled Fraternity obligations since the last Convention and that had the best chapter letters. As chapter correspondent, Mattie was responsible for these letters from Sigma.

Mattie's reputation as an enthusiastic Chi Omega and an outstanding writer preceded her arrival at the convention and after delegates elected the then-*The Eleusis* Editor Ida Pace Purdue as national president, they turned their attention to Mattie, electing her to succeed Ida as editor.

As Mattie told the story in later years: "...I was 'dying' to be editor, and never for an instant doubted my power. Over the years, Ida never let me know when she found crudities in *The Eleusis*, as she doubtless found many, giving me enough but not too much praise for my efforts. I know she valued a youthful effort with a promise and possibility for the future."



As editor, Mattie began issuing the magazine as a quarterly- it was previously published three times a year- and she introduced department headings designed with Greek settings by Founder Christina (Ina May) Boles Morton and made frequent use of photographs. It was an issue of *The Eleusis* edited by Mattie that initially drew the interest of the local sorority Omega Psi (at Dickinson College) to Chi Omega; one of their alumnae, Mary Love

Mattie Craighill Nicholas

Collins, was impressed with the publication and determined that a charter for their local group should be pursued.

Under Mattie's direction, the first press-printed copies of the Ritual were made following the St. Louis Convention. After the 1908 Chicago Convention, she edited the Constitution and Ritual, for which she selected part of the music and arranged for their printing and distribution.

Perhaps the most important piece of work she did for the Fraternity was in the preparation of The Manual of Chi Omega in which she wrote the history, with the exception of the pages devoted to the story of the founding, which were supplied by Dr. Richardson. Printed in 1909, the volume is a true testimonial to the Fraternity's achievements. Her work as editor of our early publications not only documents Chi Omega's history and development as they occurred, but are a reflection of, as Mattie later said, "...the inner spirit of people who have created Chi Omega, not the outward circumstances."

